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D E F E N C E
O F
Dr. PRICE,
AND THE
REFORMERS of ENGLAND.

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O F

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AND THE

REFORMERS of ENGLAND,

By the Rev. CHRISTOPHER WYVILL,

Chairman of the late Committee of Association of the County of York.

PRINTED BY W. BLANCHARD,

FOR J. JOHNSON, ST. PAUL'S CHURCH-YARD; J. STOCKDALE,
PICCADILLY, LONDON; AND J. TODD, YORK.

MDCXCII.

AC 911. 1792. W95

The P R E F A C E.

IT is unusual for an Author to explain his Title-page; yet thus to deviate from the common practice may sometimes be proper or necessary; and it can hardly be more so for any other reason, than a desire to remove the doubts and difficulties, which may have occurred to many; because they have occurred to Friends, of whose good-will the Author is certain, and for whose judgment he feels much respect.

It has been suggested, that the Title of this Piece announces a Defence of the Reformers of England, in terms of such wide generality, that even a vindication of Mr. Payne's projects may be expected to be included in the design. If any person has seriously formed this expectation, he will be completely disappointed; but he cannot justly complain that the Title-page has misled him: It is evidently improper to suppose that the comprehension of Mr. Payne among the Reformers of the Constitution of England was there intended; his avowed purpose is,

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not to reform or amend the System of our Government, but to overturn and destroy it. And, perhaps, it is not arrogating too much to the Associators, by whom a Reformation of Parliament was first proposed, about twelve years ago, and whose principles, with great improvements, were digested into a practical plan, and offered to Parliament by Mr. Pitt, in the year 1785, to distinguish them as Men, eminently deserving the appellation of "The Reformers of England."

It has been suggested also, that the Author ought not to have been described as Chairman of the *late* Committee of Association of the County of York; because the intimation, that the Committee is considered as not now existing, may prevent the re-assembly of that Body hereafter, when circumstances may have rendered that measure very desirable; and it may be construed as equivalent to a declaration that the Association itself is also dissolved, and that the laudable measures for restoring Parliament to its ancient purity, which the Yorkshire Freeholders associated to effect, have been abandoned in despair. This is a grave and a weighty objection; it has
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been fairly stated; and it shall be explicitly answered.

The Author declares then, that he does not consider himself freed from the engagement he voluntarily entered into, when he signed the Association of the County of York; that engagement he deems an irrevocable act, which will bind him to the end of his life, unless the objects shall be sooner obtained for which that measure was concerted. In these sentiments, he believes that the associated Freeholders of Yorkshire are generally agreed; though he is aware, that a few exceptions there possibly may be.— But the permanent nature of the Association would not justify the assumption of any permanent power by the Committee. The Committee was a deputed, not as its enemies in vain endeavoured to represent it, a self-created Body. It was originally appointed by a General Meeting of the County of York, in the year 1779; and it was re-appointed by several subsequent County Meetings for certain purposes, and with certain powers, specified at the time of appointment: In conformity with the trust thus vested in them, and in strict adherence to the principles of Representation,

the Gentlemen of the Yorkshire Committee exerted vigorous efforts for a period of more than five years, to effect a moderate but substantial Reformation of Parliament; and twice, in the course of that time, they reported their Proceedings to their Constituents, in full Meetings of the County of York, and received their approbation of their conduct.

After that period, when the measures which they had laboured with so much zeal to recommend to their Countrymen, for want of general support by the People, were defeated in Parliament by the joint influence of the Aristocracy, it would have been disadvantageous to the cause of Liberty to have wearied the friends of political Reformation with hopeless exertions. It was evident that the nation, at that time, was not ripe for Reformation; and the repetition of unsupported demands by the County of York would but have tended, by giving their patriotic efforts an appearance of ridiculous obstinacy, to discredit at once the County, and the Cause which it had so well supported.

For these reasons it has been understood that no Meeting of the Committee has been held since the rejection of Mr. Pitt's motion
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in Parliament, in the year 1785, to amend the Representation of Parliament; and it was prudent thus to discontinue their exertions, till, from the more general concurrence of their fellow-citizens, their activity was likely to succeed. But after having ceased for seven years to exercise their powers as a Deputed Body, the Committee surely could not, with propriety, resume their operations, without fresh authority from the County of York. It would be strange indeed, if the just principles of Representation were violated by the very Persons whom it behoves to adhere to them with the most scrupulous exactness; whose constant complaint it has been that those principles have not been duly regarded, either in the formation or in the conduct of the Legislature. It may be confidently asserted, that the Gentlemen who composed the Committee of Yorkshire will never act in a manner unbecoming their Constitutional principles, that they will wait in silent expectation till the altered sentiments of their fellow-citizens shall have rendered it expedient, in the opinion of the County of York, to renew the struggle to destroy the System of Parliamentary

liamentary Corruption. Then, and not before, the activity of the former Committee, (if the County shall think fit to repose that trust in them again,) may be recommenced with propriety, and with a much better prospect of success than from a different conduct could be expected.

In these sentiments the Author hopes that he has the general concurrence of the Gentlemen of the Committee with whom he had the honour to act; and whose long-experienced candour, and confidence in the uprightness of his intentions, he never can think of without a mixed sensation of pride and gratitude. With that disinterested band of Patriots he will be most ready to co-operate again whenever the proper season for renewing their enterprise shall have arrived; and their Constituents shall have re-appointed them a Committee for the attainment of the same laudable and necessary Reformation which they before proposed, by the same peaceful and legal means which they before employed; and he trusts that their ardour to resume this honourable pursuit is also undiminished—that they behold with pleasure the increasing zeal of their countrymen in the cause of Reformation—
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and the nearer approach of that favourable moment, when, with the approbation and renewed authority of the County of York, and with a more decisive concurrence of the real friends of the Constitution in other parts of the kingdom, their efforts may be successfully exerted to obtain a just redress of their Constitutional Grievances.

The reader shall now be detained only till he is apprised, that the invitation of Dr. Price by the Congress of America, in the year 1780, to go over to assist in the regulation of their finances; and his concurrence in sentiment with the General Body of Dissenters, when in the year 1784 they strenuously opposed Mr. Fox's East-India Bill, are facts asserted in the Defence on the authority of Mr. William Morgan, Dr. Price's nephew, by whom the information was obligingly communicated, through friends connected with that Gentleman and the Author.

YORK,
April 9, 1792.

In the PRESS, and in a few months will be published,

By the Rev. CHRISTOPHER WYVILL,

A Collection of Political Papers,

IN THREE VOLUMES, OCTAVO,

Chiefly respecting the late ATTEMPT by the
COUNTY of YORK, and other ASSOCIATED
BODIES, to effect a REFORMATION of the
PARLIAMENT of GREAT-BRITAIN.

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Dr. P R I C E, &c.

HAVING lately employed myself in forming a collection of Political Papers, chiefly respecting the attempt by several of our Counties, principal Cities and Towns, to correct the Corruption and restore the Freedom and Independence of Parliament, from near the end of the year 1779, to the middle of the year 1785, I have been unavoidably led by the nature of my task to peruse the greatest part of the papers which were published by Popular Meetings, in different parts of the kingdom, during that period. After this review of their Proceedings, I think it may be asserted with truth, that the general conduct of these Assemblies of the Collective Body and the Committees appointed by

them, was unexceptionably prudent and manly; that their language was firm but decent, becoming FREEMEN alarmed by the misfortunes of an ill-fated and expensive War, and justly offended by the servility and corruption of their Representatives; that their measures were sincerely designed to promote the Public good, supported with vigour and persevering zeal, yet with a constant adherence to order and legality, and finally successful to terminate those fatal hostilities, and introduce a more faithful and economical expenditure of the Public Money. But the Associations had been convinced at an early period that somewhat more than Peace, and a retrenchment of the public expenditure was necessary for the safety of the Country. They had seen, that the Corruption of Parliament and the continuation of the Civil War with America were justly to be imputed to those gross abuses in the frame and duration of Parliament, which had chiefly originated in the present century; and that unless an effectual redress of those grievances could be obtained, the evils of a corrupt Administration might soon be experienced again, to the utter ruin of the nation. Against these abuses therefore the efforts of the Popular Meetings were principally directed, but without success, although in effect they aimed at not much more than the Restoration of the Constitution as it had stood soon after the æra of the Revolution. For since that period, from the great extension of our commerce and distant territorial

torial possessions, and the consequent augmentation of our naval and military establishments, from the continual accumulation of taxes, and the proportional increase of those persons by whom they are collected, the Crown has gradually been enabled to influence or command Elections in many sea-ports and other places, while within the same period, in still more Boroughs the Aristocracy by various unwarrantable arts, especially by creating fraudulent and fictitious votes, has destroyed the Right of Election, and acquired the absolute power of nomination. To obtain the Repeal of the Septennial Act, and a just Redress of these usurpations in the Boroughs, were the ultimate objects of the Popular pursuit; but the last of these necessary measures the Associations did not endeavour to effect on the extensive principle of universal suffrage; but in a more temperate mode, in which a substantial improvement of the Constitution might have been safely and peacefully accomplished. And in the whole progress of this enterprise of the People to correct great and dangerous abuses, I believe not one instance can be produced of disloyalty to the Prince on the Throne, or disaffection to the Constitution, which is discoverable in any expression by any one public Meeting; hardly, perhaps, by any individual Member of the Associated Bodies.

In these measures the Protestant Dissenters concurred, with equal temper and moderation, and with signal unanimity throughout the kingdom.

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But if any man should entertain a suspicion, that under this cloak of moderation they covered sinister designs at that time, it is but impartial justice to state, that the suspicion must be ill-founded, that it is contradicted by facts which prove their attachment to the true Principles of the Constitution, at that season of great and general discontent; when any latent disloyalty to the Prince, any secret wish to change the general frame of our Government, would have been disclosed by the heat and effervescence of the times. The reverse of these dispositions then was theirs; in every meeting, of which the Dissenters composed a majority, or any considerable part, it may be remarked with truth, that the language of their Petitions, and of their Plans of Association, strongly expressed their adherence to the Principles of our mixed Government, by King, Lords, and Commons. I shall particularly point out the Petition of the County of Cambridge in 1780, that of the County of Kent in 1782, and the Forms of Association adopted about that time by the towns of Cambridge and Nottingham, as containing evident proofs of this assertion.*

These circumstances appear sufficiently to exculpate the Dissenters from the charge of disaffection at that juncture; and since the preservation of our Constitutional Liberties, and of the Brunswick Family on the Throne, may be justly
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* For these Papers, see the Appendix.

ascribed in a great measure to their zeal and attachment, often manifested in times of public distress and danger; any charge of disaffection on that respectable body of men, now when public affairs are conducted with prosperity and with attention to the interests and opinions of the community, must appear highly improbable; and if not established by very clear and decisive proofs, ought to be rejected as a groundless and incredible accusation.

And yet this injurious imputation, which on the late motion for a repeal of the Test Laws was urged against the Dissenters with uncommon vehemence, seems to have been lightly admitted as a charge indisputably proved, though unsupported by any more solid ground of conviction, than vague surmise and personal invective. By the Test Laws, the Dissenters are ignominiously marked as men unfit to be trusted with any honourable or advantageous office, or a share even in the Government of a Corporate Town: they are forbidden to indulge the wish, which every good Citizen must naturally feel, to serve his Country in any civil or military post for which his attainments fit him; their capacities for public employment are doomed to lie uncultivated and useless; the avenues of honest ambition are barred against them, and the conditions on which alone they can be opened are more degrading than the exclusion itself. Under this long proscription, the pati-

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ence of the Dissenters was not wearied out; their affection to the Government, which, in this respect had treated them harshly, was not alienated. For fifty years they acquiesced in silence under the disgrace and disabilities of the Test Laws. At last, observing the more liberal spirit of this age, and the tolerant disposition which had been displayed by Parliament in their recent concessions to the Roman Catholics, and to their own Ministers, they were encouraged to renew their humble requests, that the Test Laws might be repealed. But when their complaints were heard once more, they were not couched in fullen or reproachful language; they were expressed with a respectful deference to Parliament, yet with that decent firmness which freedom and conscious integrity will always inspire. Nothing prior or subsequent to their defeat has indicated a spirit of mutinous disaffection, or disobedience to the laws. After repeated denials of that equality of Civil Rights, to which every unoffending Citizen has a just claim, they have ceased to importune Parliament; they have retired from the Bar of the Legislature with the dignity of injured but patient men, who have learned to bear legal ignominy without dejection or unseemly irritation; who have resolved to await the slow Revolution of Public Opinion, and relying on the rectitude of their cause, and the increasing influence of reason alone, still trust that their countrymen will

will at last grant them that justice which they have hitherto refused.

Against such men requesting to share the Common Rights of Citizens, the ordinary pleas of Intolerance would have been addressed with little effect to the candour and liberality of Parliament; their eager opposers would have attempted in vain to give to their unjust policy the colour of political expediency; in vain they would have endeavoured to alarm the Friends of our limited Monarchy, by renewing the hackneyed objections, that Dissenters, deeming Episcopacy unwarrantable by Scripture, must be enemies to the Institution of Bishops, must wish the Abolition of an Order of Men who form an important part of the Legislature; whose right of voting with the Peers could not be taken away without exposing the Crown to Democratic Invasion.

The suggestion is unsupported by any collateral circumstances, or any apparent likelihood of danger; it probably would have made little impression on Parliament, and it surely could have been applied with little prospect of success to those Senators, whose opinions justly bear the the greatest weight in that assembly.—For it must have been instantly felt, that to wish some important changes in the form of Government is not inconsistent with the true idea of allegiance; that rational and good Men might deem the Cinque Port Barons an objectionable part

of the House of Commons, or the translation of Bishops a defect in the House of Peers; that it even might be their opinion, that the entire exclusion of that Order from the House of Peers would be neither injurious to Religion, nor disadvantageous to the political interest of the Community; and yet such Men might be truly good Citizens, might cordially approve our Government by King, Lords, and Commons, might upon the whole be well satisfied with that share of happiness which may be enjoyed under our Constitution; might have no design, no wish to disturb the tranquillity of the public; on the contrary, conceiving our Government to be invested with a lawful and beneficial authority, they might cheerfully submit to it in a private station, and be willing, in a public capacity, to support it with fidelity and active zeal.

These are the dispositions which, in a larger view than that of strict law, constitute a good Citizen; and, where these dispositions are evident, it is a matter of no concern to the State, to scrutinize thought, or to pass a judicial sentence on private opinion, and harmless if not useful speculation. If Men of these dispositions should not be thought to bear that dutiful attachment to the State, which our laws require, if allegiance should be construed to imply an acceptance of the Constitution and all its establishments, as perfect models of political wisdom, and absolutely incapable of any emendation; allegiance

allegiance would be incompatible with common sense and observation. Such an idea of allegiance is manifestly indefensible—contending parties must have agreed to renounce it.

In all probability, therefore, the application for a repeal of the Test Laws would have been admitted by the united wisdom and justice of the House, if more powerful means had not been found to rouse the jealous spirit of State Policy; and to suppress, in minds of the greatest benignity and wisdom of the purest piety and virtue, their better principles of TOLERATION.

Some Dissenting Ministers of much ability and reputation had hazarded, with an honest zeal, to publish their opinions on the inutility and impropriety of any religious establishment; had expressed a detestation of the corruptions of Parliament, and an admiration of certain Republican forms of Government. These hardy sentiments were detailed to the House in quotations from the Authors alluded to; and their Adversary, whose declamatory talents, for some years, had been little attended to, had once more the satisfaction to find that the House listened to him, and that his personal invectives had made that impression which he wished, and which his reasoning must have failed to produce. A majority of the Members were shocked by these freedoms of speculative Men, they were appalled by the magnified dangers of INNOVATION; one common sentiment of fear pervaded their
breasts,

breasts, stifled their accustomed feelings of equity and benevolence, and determined them still to prolong the restraint of those partial laws, by which our Dissenting Brethren are held in a state of disgraceful inferiority; "Thou art not Cæsar's friend if thou let these Men go free."

But if the Dissenting Ministers, who were reprobated on this occasion with so much severity, had really been as bad Citizens, as turbulent and seditious Men, as their accuser wished to represent them, how could it consist with justice for the faults of two or three Individual Dissenters to punish thousands of that denomination, not only without evidence of their disloyalty, but even against their solemn protestations of attachment to the Constitution, before the accusation was heard or suspected; and against the stronger proof resulting from the uniform and collective loyalty of the Dissenters for the preceding century. If the General Body of Dissenters in the present age should be acquitted of disloyalty, and yet their punishment as disloyal Men should be thought necessary, because the influence of the Ministers alluded to may too probably taint the Dissenters of the next generation with their obnoxious principles, it is impossible to foresee, to what intolerable oppression this strange principle may not lead the Legislature. Justice ought to be to States as well as to Individuals, the unchangeable rule of their morality; to inflict hardships on particular classes
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of Men, who have actually done nothing to merit them, is a palpable breach of that rule, which the bare possibility of danger from those Men cannot justify. But to treat Men of this age with hardship, on a precarious speculation, that dangers may arise from other Men of the same sect in some future generation, is to combine the utmost injustice with the most manifest impolicy.

Observations like these were ably, though ineffectually, urged in favour of the Dissenters, by their magnanimous Advocate on the late motion for the Repeal of the Test-Act. But the powerful reasoning urged on that occasion might have received perhaps some additional force, had it been inquired whether the allegations against the accused individuals afford any substantial ground even for their conviction as bad Citizens, on whom the disabilities of the Test Laws might be inflicted, or continued with justice. That this question may be discussed with brevity, I shall confine myself to the consideration of the single case of Dr. Price, whose talents and virtues justly placed him at the head of the Dissenters; but whose character, mild and amiable as it was, could not protect him from the rage of their Accuser, who insulted his feelings with insolent censure or more insolent commendation; who exhausted all the arts of his false and fraudulent eloquence to render this excellent Man at once odious and despicable; aiming
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in his supposed criminality to involve the whole Body of the Dissenters, and ultimately to discredit the cause of Political Reformation, and the men by whom that cause had been promoted.

It has been alleged, and a deep impression has been made by the allegation, that more dangerous principles of non-conformity have been introduced or revived by Dr. Price, than those which had been the usual grounds of separation assigned by his predecessors: That his dissent was not merely a dislike of Bishops or of the Clerical Vestments; a disapprobation of our Liturgy and our Articles of Religion; or a conviction that the imposition of human forms of faith and worship is inconsistent with the liberty of Christians and the divine authority of the Gospel: That Dr. Price was an adversary to every possible institution of a National Church: That he aimed to subvert the present, without establishing another form of public Religion in its place: That he would disband the National Clergy, abolish every emolument provided for them by the State, and abandon the support of Religion to the voluntary zeal of Men willing, on such terms, to teach or to be taught: That the able Men who concur with him in these sentiments, would too probably succeed in diffusing them through the whole Body of the Dissenters; and that the tendency and final issue of these principles was nothing less than the introduction of anarchy and

and confusion, the triumph of fanaticism and the ruin of learning and rational religion.

To this it may be replied, that it is the interest of the Community that a free examination of every Institution should be permitted, and even encouraged; and, consequently, that speculative Men, who may be led in the course of their disquisitions to condemn any Public Establishment, either in part or in whole, ought not to be punished by disgrace or any other penalty whatever.

Establishments, which in one age may have been useful or necessary, in another may have become useless, inconvenient, or pernicious; either the beneficial end for which they were ordained may be more easily attainable without them; or fraud and corruption may have perverted them from their original design to serve an unworthy purpose; and then benefit to a few individuals may be produced, but the Community will be injured. And this is not uncommonly the end, whatever may have been the design of all human institutions. Government itself, which is formed for the general benefit, is apt to degenerate into tyranny; the Magistrate is intrusted with much power, he grows fond of it, and wishes to usurp more; or, perhaps, he exercises the power he has, not for the common good, but his own separate advantage; in either of these cases, it is a work of difficulty and of danger too to controul the Magistrate;

gistrate; and therefore his ambition and his injustice too frequently succeed. And when Men are embodied in any subordinate capacity, they are then apt to be influenced by a Corporation Spirit, which tempts them to prefer the partial interests of that class or profession to which they belong, to the general welfare of their Country. At first the establishment may have been benevolently and wisely planned, and the Public for some time may have reaped advantage from the faithful Administration of its Officers; after that, the primitive zeal is observed to cool; the performance of professional duty becomes irksome, it is gradually relaxed, neglected, and at length wholly abandoned; and yet the emoluments originally annexed to the actual discharge of duty, will frequently be retained, and even increased to the highest amount, when little or no professional duty has been performed. Such is the tendency of human selfishness, under the specious pretext of zeal for the profession; and such the progress of every institution to a state of extreme abuse, when exempt from controul, and unsubjected to free examination.

It must be admitted, however, that partial evil may sometimes be the consequence of popular controul or free discussion. The just and patriotic Magistrate may be the object of groundless jealousy and distrust; and his power may be reduced within limits too narrow to permit
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him to effect the good he wishes. But this is an evil comparatively of little moment. For it is easy to enlarge his power, when experience has shewn it to be expedient, or to adopt his plans, when discussion has proved their utility. But when the power of popular controul is lost, there are no regular or pacific means left by which the corruptions and oppressions of Government can be checked; the Community then lies prostrate at the feet of Absolute Power; and it will not be long before Absolute Power will have manifested its tiger disposition, and devoured its prey.

Unreasonable prejudice too may attack the most useful Institutions of a subordinate kind. It may demand the reformation of abuses where none exist; or it may attempt to abolish what ought to be only reformed. But here also, the evils resulting from the abuse of free discussion are evidently inconsiderable, and far out-weighed by the superior advantages of intellectual liberty. There is indeed, in all controversy, somewhat unpleasant to our feelings; we are apt to be indolent; we are apt to be fastidious; if the subject in debate be trivial and uninteresting, the arguments of the disputer are thrown away, and his wit itself soon grown tiresome. If it be an important subject, we have already perhaps formed our sentiments upon it; we dislike the trouble to review them, and complain that our repose and acquiescence in preconceived opinion

have been disturbed: Men of mild and amiable dispositions are apt to overlook the advantages of discussion, and to lament the heats which are often excited among disputants, and their frequent breaches of candour and charity; while Men of mistaken humility exaggerate the weakness and imperfection of human reason, and bewildered in the mazes of controversy, know not where to turn, or what opinion to adopt, but that discussion is to be shunned as alike to them fruitless and unsatisfactory. But we are not to reject profitable toil, because it is not always attended with pleasure, for that would be extremely unreasonable; nor are we, with mistaken humility, to doom human understanding to rust in perpetual inactivity, for that would be a mischievous and impracticable attempt to thwart the designs of Providence, and stop the improvement of Mankind. Our intellectual faculty, imperfect as it is, was given by God to Man, to be freely exercised, and to be alike the means of happiness to Individuals and to Communities: to suppress or obstruct the free operation of this instrument of our felicity must be in a greater or a less degree disadvantageous; it must have a tendency more or less direct to perpetuate whatever is false in human opinion, by preventing confutation; and to consecrate whatever is useless or pernicious in human institutions, by teaching us to think of the Works of
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Man, as we ought to think of the Works of God alone, that whatever is—is right.

It is true, that in the controversies of speculative Men, and in the struggles of contending parties, the general opinion is not unfrequently erroneous for some time; because Mankind are liable to be misled by the mistatement of facts, and apt to accept eloquent declamation instead of solid and conclusive reasoning. But it is unquestionable, that what is true or beneficial, may be more easily proved to be what it really is, than what is false or pernicious, can be proved to be what it really is not. By this single circumstance, a decisive advantage in all polemical struggles is for ever fixed on the side of truth and general utility; and hence, under a just freedom of discussion, that Cause which involves the interest of the Community will be ultimately successful. Sometimes the Adversary of that Cause may combat with a transient superiority; he may possess unusual powers of reasoning; he may cover his fallacies with uncommon art and eloquence; but his triumph will be of short duration, and the mischief done will be of little extent. Genius, equally vigorous, will soon arise to point out and correct his errors; equal powers of eloquence and reason will be exerted to recommend the truth, but with a success more extensive and more lasting.—The Public Mind, having viewed the subject on every side, having seen every fallacy detected, every
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solid argument unanswerably maintained, will yield at last to full conviction; and the consequence of the controversy will be, the advancement of Human Knowledge, and the augmented happiness of the Community.

To what can we ascribe the gradual improvement of these civilized European Countries from a state of savage barbarism, but to the efforts of Reason; of Reason often exerted against the interests of an injurious Government in opposition to gross and prevailing prejudice, and in defiance of the sanguinary statutes of an ignorant and intolerant age? How truly insignificant then are all the partial evils which have arisen from free examination and popular controul, when compared with the mighty benefits which have been obtained by these means, under circumstances very discouraging and very disadvantageous to the exertions of Reason and Public Spirit! And how greatly more might the condition of mankind be yet improved, in every art, in every virtue which can accommodate or adorn human life, if just restraints on the ambition of Government were generally imposed, if the free exercise of Reason were permitted, and disgrace were annexed by the laws to crimes alone.

But of all human establishments, those which have been formed for the promotion of Religion are perhaps the most liable to great and dangerous abuse. Respecting these institutions the
freedom

freedom of speculative men ought, least of all to be confined. From the reverence which is justly paid to the sacred doctrines of Religion, the Priesthood in all Countries have usually acquired a great degree of influence over the National mind; and the history of Europe in the darker and less inquisitive ages shows, that this influence has been employed to aggrandize the sacerdotal order, to suppress free inquiry, to encourage superstition, and to perpetuate, if that had been possible, the credulity and blind submission of the People by whom the Clergy had been unwisely elevated to excessive wealth and grandeur. After the revival of letters in the fifteenth Century, and the consequent diffusion of useful knowledge, a considerable Reformation of Ecclesiastical abuses was soon effected; the doctrines of Christianity were explained in a manner more consonant with common sense, and the riches of the Clergy were reduced within more moderate bounds in England, and in many other parts of Europe. Whether that Reformation of the established Church in England was carried at first as far as it ever ought to be carried; whether the doctrines and the forms of Public worship in our Church are unexceptionable; whether the power and wealth of our Clergy are conducive to the advancement of piety, or the benefit of the Community; whether the ends of Religion may not now, or at some future period, be more completely obtained, through the diligence of

Ministers

Ministers depending on the voluntary contributions of their respective Congregations, than under the Ministry of an equally learned but less active Clergy for whom the laws have provided an income independent of their Parishioners; these are questions on which speculative men should be allowed to differ, and to give a negative to each, without reproach. For it is important to the Community, that on these subjects it should form a just and well considered judgement, not an opinion taken up without examination, on the authority of the Priest, or the Magistrate; because they may have an interest to support abuses, but the Community cannot.

These are at all times proper subjects of discussion; and if in each case, the question should be decided by unbiassed Reason, the honour of Religion, and the welfare of the Public, would not be sacrificed as they often have been to gratify the wishes of the superior Clergy; the correction of abuses, the more successful promotion of piety, justice, and benevolence would then become the primary objects of attention; and the case and accommodation of Ministers in the House of Peers would be deemed subordinate considerations.

But when the examination of such questions is prevented by the State, or which is nearly equivalent, when dissent is punished in the sanguinary mode of corporal severities, or discouraged

couraged by legal disgrace and the privation of Civil Rights, the natural consequence of this policy must be a constant accumulation of abuses in the Church, instead of progressive improvement; and the strong and increasing disapprobation of serious men, instead of that general conformity which a more liberal policy would gradually produce.

But it may be objected, that the principles of toleration here laid down are too extensive to be valid; that they hold out impunity to men of all religions and of *none*; that to tolerate unbelievers of every class is to encourage irreligion; and that the consequence of such improvident encouragement of irreligion, in any Community, must be the final prevalence of Atheism, and the ruin of that sense of Religion by which the crimes of Mankind are chiefly restrained and their miseries consoled. These objections, perhaps, have been sufficiently obviated by the general observations which have been already stated. But since pious men, from such invidious suggestions, may too readily entertain fearful apprehensions of the event, should the principles of unlimited toleration be adopted; it may not be improper to recall to their recollection these unheeded, but important truths; that it is not lawful to use force, or any species of corrupt influence to promote the acceptance of religious truth; that the propagation of Religion by any means, but those of argument and rational con-

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viction, is contrary to the whole tenor of the Gospel, and the practice of our Divine Master; that, under the Pagan Governments, soon after our Saviour's appearance in the world, popular superstition and philosophic incredulity were equally subdued by the power of reason alone, and Christianity, poor, despised, and persecuted, in a short time became the Religion of the civilized World: while in Christian Countries and in a subsequent age, in which the Public Forms of Religion have not been improved up to the general standard of good sense, and in which the Clergy have become the objects of contempt or envy, for their wealth and power, for their secularity, their disregard of professional duty, and their apparent inutility to the Public, no terrors, no severities of an inquisition, have been able to prevent the growth of irreligion. Penal severities may compel the unbeliever to submit to the Priest's authority: but aversion to a Religion, so propagated, will take a still deeper root in his heart; the spectator of his sufferings will sympathise with him, will be tempted to adopt his resentments, and join in his unbelief. On such occasions it is a reflection which naturally occurs; that force, or fraud, or corruption, must be unnecessary and improper supports of a Religion founded on Divine Authority; and the Church system, which cannot stand without those props, must have been built upon a foundation originally bad, or the superstructure must be in a very

insecure

infecure and a very disgraceful state of dilapidation. From this dilemma, the intolerant Churchman finds it impossible to escape; but it cannot entangle the more consistent Christian; who respects the Rights of Conscience, and who, relying on the truth and divine efficacy of the Gospel, will not consent to dishonour his Religion, by employing fraud, or by accepting the aid of either compulsion or corruption.

In England, unbelievers are certainly liable to penal statutes of great severity; but the Spirit of the Times is more liberal than the Letter of our Laws; the indulgence of Government, and the concurrence of the Public, have reduced to a state of dormancy many of those intolerant statutes which have not yet been repealed. Even the Test Laws, which bear with so much hardship on Christian Dissenters of every sect, are found in practice seldom to exclude from civil offices, unbelievers of any denomination. It is notorious, that many of the superior stations of trust and honour are filled by persons who reject Christianity, and who scarcely admit a single article of the Religion of Reason. I cannot commend the laxity of their practice, who thus communicate with a National Church, the most important doctrines of which they wholly disbelieve; nor can I praise the policy of a Legislature, which retains a Test easily eluded by men of no Religion, and effectual only to exclude those conscientious Christians who scruple to

concur in some unessential particulars; but embrace the substantial part of the Public Religion. But while men of capacity, for Public Affairs, are to be found among the various tribes of unbelievers, it is an advantage to the Public, that their defective Creed should be no bar to their employment. In the present reign, Hume, Gibbon, Smith, were appointed without scruple to respectable posts in various departments of the State; their appointment was honourable to the liberality of our Government, and they served their Country with the approbation of every candid and equitable Christian. But when a Politician can unite in himself the discordant characters of Bigot and Unbeliever, when he can support by force what he believes to be false; when he can insult the Religion of his Country by profaning its most sacred ceremony in the act of Public Celebration; and yet can exceed the most intolerant Churchman, in zeal, to preserve the statutes of persecution unrepealed; if power should be intrusted to such a man, it would excite an indignant disapprobation which no professional abilities could diminish. And should he chance to sit upon one of the highest seats of Magistracy, it would only be more necessary, for the sake of injured Freedom and Religion, to brand him as an Oppressor of Men much better than himself: He, a gloomy scorners of Christianity, who supports the established system of superstition, as he deems it,

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with all the terrors of penal severity; they, conscientious men, who, in some unessential articles, dissent from the Church, but who sincerely embrace the substance of that Religion, which their injurious persecutor wholly rejects.

If then persons, who dissent fundamentally from the Religion of the Public, ought not to suffer the persecution either of corporal punishment or of legal disgrace, it is surely evident, that persons who agree with the Church in fundamentals, and differ only in some unessential circumstances, ought, with still more reason, to be exempt from all discouragements, either of greater or of less severity. In England, for instance, if the questions should be debated, whether the Church does not need Reformation, in points which respect her discipline or doctrine, the distribution of her Revenues, or the political power of her Prelates; why should that Citizen incur disgrace, who reprobates Ecclesiastical Sinecures or the translation of Bishops, and their consequent subjection to the undue influence of the Court, more than he who rescinded sinecures in the State, and attempted to eject the Cornish Burgesses, the Cinque Port Barons, from the House of Commons? Or if any one should hazard an opinion, that Piety and every Christian Virtue might be more effectually taught by Ministers, paid by voluntary contribution, than by a Body of Clergy, entitled by law to tithes and other emoluments, why should

should he not be allowed freely and without reproach to support his speculations; just as another on a different subject, of far inferior, but still of great importance, might, without offence, declare his opinion, that a standing army for the defence of this island is unnecessary, and might be exchanged with advantage for a volunteer militia? That the establishment of a National Church, in any Country, is absolutely necessary for the support of Religion, is a position which cannot be maintained, with any colour of reason, because it is contradicted by indisputable facts, in ancient and in modern times; by the gradual propagation of Christianity for three centuries after the death of Christ, without the aid of an established Clergy, and by the success which now attends the labours of the Dissenting Ministers, who, like their Predecessors in the primitive ages, devote themselves to the service of Religion, without a prospect of legal provision. That such Institutions are in their nature unlawful, is another position which is equally untenable; because the Jewish Religion affords a direct precedent of a National Church established; as every Christian must admit by Divine Authority, because the formation of National Christian Churches is not forbidden by the Gospel; and because common consent affords to National Churches, as it does to those which are merely congregational, a similar and a sufficient sanction: But when
dissentions

diffentions have arisen, in any Country, respecting the Religion of the Public, and no assent of the People approaching nearly to general approbation can be supposed, there may then arise questions of expediency, whether an attempt ought to be made to regain that general approbation which has been lost, by reforming the Institutions of the Church, or whether the establishment itself ought not to be wholly laid aside, and the propagation of Religion to be intrusted to the zeal and assiduity of unendowed Teachers.

On this subject I am free to acknowledge, that my sentiments differ widely from those which have been imputed to Dr. Price. The establishment of a Parochial Clergy, under the superintendance of Episcopal Officers, in the present very imperfect state of knowledge and virtue in the World, appears to be of important use. In England, though many of the Clergy are suffered to hold a plurality of livings, to be even wholly non-resident, and the litigious nature of the provision, to which the law entitles them, often renders those who do not desert their Parochial Duty, incapable of doing the good which otherwise might be expected from them; yet, under these manifest disadvantages, our Parochial Clergy may justly be praised as a very learned and a very useful Body of Men; of whom many, perhaps a majority, are exemplary in the performance of their duty, and successful in promoting good morals and a serious sense of Religion. Even in the most remote and unfrequented parts

parts of the Country, good order, decency, and civility are promoted, in a considerable degree, by their example and influence, in the small districts which are committed to their instruction. And though grave and able Pastors, of the Dissenting Congregations, are supported in a respectable manner by voluntary stipends in many of our rich and populous towns; I know not any facts from whence it may be collected, that the small and thinly peopled parishes in the country would be generally supplied with a set of Ministers as learned and rational as the present, if the establishment of any Parochial Clergy were to be abolished.

But though the opinion of Dr. Price, on this subject, may have been erroneous, yet it was the error of a sincere and generous mind. Pious, benevolent, and disinterested, he may have thought mankind more generally influenced by an active zeal for Religion, than experience proves them to be: convinced of the Divine Origin of the Gospel, and its efficacy finally to overcome all opposition, he may have valued too lightly the benefits actually derived from our National Clergy, and the much greater advantages which under a reformed Establishment would soon be the consequence of their increasing zeal and assiduity: warmed with the contemplation of that state of perfection, to which mankind are uniformly, though slowly advancing, in which Piety will be found to flourish
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without the aid of the Priest, and Justice will be securely relied on without the intervention of the Magistrate, he may have been too ready to conclude that Ecclesiastical Establishments, in every form, are useless at present, and ought to be exchanged for the simple and original mode of Instruction, by voluntary and undowered Teachers. That we are far distant from that state of general knowledge and virtue, in which it would be expedient to adopt this scheme, is readily allowed. But shall a Man, of great and useful talents, of exemplary piety and virtue, be punished with infamy for speculations like these, which, instead of being derogatory from Religion, manifest the firmest reliance on its Divine Authority: or forfeit his civil rights for prematurely proposing schemes of Instruction, which every good man must wish we were worthy to receive, and which it is the joint aim of Law and Religion to fit us to adopt? If these peculiarities of opinion, which, in fact, have been altogether harmless, are yet in a legal consideration offences against the State for which Dr. Price was justly punishable; what Man of serious thought can be deemed innocent, or in what but abject ignorance, or a servile compliance with Public Opinion, can safety be found? Intolerance has a microscopic eye, which can discover danger or criminality in any speculation on any subject. In her view, whether the subject of disquisition be theological or moral,

whether it relate to metaphysics or natural philosophy, freedom of inquiry is always dangerous, and novelty of sentiment is never free from guilt. On such reasons, the disgrace of Price may be approved; and on similar grounds, Clarke and Hoadly, Newton and Locke, Churchmen, who were the ornaments of their profession; Philosophers, who were the honour of their Country, might have been condemned as Men of dangerous speculation and disturbers of the Public Peace. And thus the Zealots of Church Power, proceeding step by step from one degree of intolerance to another more severe, might justify, by parity of reason, the imprisonment of Galileo at Rome, the legal murder of Servetus at Geneva, the burning of Protestants in London, and the massacre of the Hugonots in Paris.

Such were the barbarities which disgraced our Ancestors in a ferocious age. Under a state of milder manners, we shudder at the mention of them; and the execution of a single Dissident at Smithfield, would now excite general horror, and prove the ruin of our National Church. But though these cruel spectacles are seen among us no more, our eager Churchmen must not flatter themselves that they have ceased to be intolerant. Toleration indeed has long been the maxim of our Civil Government; in the present reign, the severer statutes of persecution have been repealed, or
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their operation, with few exceptions has been suspended; and if zealous Churchmen had testified no repugnance to the repeal of the Test Laws, it is probable that the conduct of Government, on the late agitation of that question, might have been conformable with their general maxims, and the request of the Dissenters might have been granted by Parliament. But surely little praise is due to the tolerant principles of those Churchmen, who applaud indeed the repeal of those sanguinary statutes, which, from the increased humanity of the age, it was found impossible to execute, but who obstinately insist on retaining those less rigorous Penal Laws, which, punishing opinion by disgrace and the forfeiture of civil rights alone, may still be allowed to operate to a great extent, with no immediate hazard.

To Louis XIV. it seems to have been exclusively reserved, in an enlightened age, to join the extreme of refinement, with that of intolerant severity. His Capital was the residence of science, arts, and learning; his Court was the seat of splendour, elegance, and every voluptuous enjoyment; but his Cabinet was the cell of an Inquisitor. Intoxicated with conquest and unlimited power, this Despot resolved to endure no Religion in France but his own; he revoked the Edict of Nantes; he sent Dragoons into every Province to compel his Protestant Subjects to embrace his Religion, but dissatisfied with

their success, he sent other Missionaries in this unhallowed work of conversion, to seduce and to win them over by bribes. It is difficult to say, whether the compulsion employed on this occasion was more odious and detestable, or the corruption was more base and despicable. But it is too evident, that so long as our Test Laws shall remain unrepealed, the conduct of our Government will bear a near resemblance to the practice of this superstitious Tyrant in these pecuniary conversions. The mode is somewhat different; the principle and the effect intended are the same.

Our milder system of intolerance indeed disclaims all corporal severities, but it endeavours corruptly to support the Religion of the State; by annexing honours and the emoluments of civil office, to the profession of orthodox belief. But this species of undue influence is as impolitic and ineffectual for the end proposed, as it is unreasonable and contrary to the purity of the Gospel; it dishonours the Public Religion, and yet it does not diminish the number of Dissenters. On the contrary, the Dissenters have long been a growing Body; and they are now increasing, perhaps, with greater rapidity than in any former period. There are among them Men of great learning and genius, who, to piety and unblemished morals, add an eagerness of zeal against the Established Church; and undoubtedly the present increase of non-conformity, in a considerable

siderable measure, may be imputed to their unwearied exertions. But this is not a circumstance peculiar to the present age. The Dissenters have always had among them able and zealous Men, whose high reputation gave credit to their cause; and whose diligence and assiduity gained profelytes not merely among persons of the inferior stations, but in a greater proportion, perhaps, among serious men of liberal education, and of opulent or independent fortunes. This, therefore, cannot be deemed a casual advantage which the Dissenters of this age possess, nor can the gradual increase of their number, during the last century, be accounted for by any accidental or precarious circumstances; it must have arisen from some permanent and powerful cause, which, under the pressure of Penal Statutes and against the efforts of a numerous and learned Clergy, has operated with constant and increasing success to separate wise and good Men from the Established Church.

It is true, the adherents of the Church of England still form a large majority of the nation; but many nominal Christians and Unbelievers of various sorts are classed among them; and there are many sincere Christians who have expressed, but more, perhaps, who have concealed their disapprobation of the forms of our Church, and their wishes for a farther Reformation, and yet are not convinced that
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they ought to join the Non-Conformists.— These considerations seem clearly to prove, that a mitigated intolerance is ill calculated to promote uniformity of Religion, that our Test Laws are unprofitably severe, and that we ought to abandon them for their inefficiency, even if duty did not require us to renounce them as dishonourable to the Gospel, and oppressive to our unoffending Fellow-Citizens. It is surely sufficient, that the inutility of this corrupt system of intolerance has been proved by the experience of a century; it is time that more honourable measures should be tried, that the maxims of impartial justice and equity should more consistently govern the conduct of the State. They are the maxims on which the wealth and tranquillity of nations principally depend; and weighed against them, the interests and wishes of the superior Clergy ought to be deemed as dust in the balance.

But the too cautious Churchman may here exclaim, that the adoption of these specious principles of universal toleration would not lessen, it would rather aggravate the evils of controversy and dissent; that the repeal of the Test Laws and the removal of every other penal restraint, which operates as a fence to the Establishment, would open to the Dissenters a prospect of success, which would augment their number with increasing rapidity; and still as their number approached more nearly to that
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of their opponents, those fierce animosities would be more inflamed, which it ought to be our endeavour to cool and compose. And it must be acknowledged, that these apprehensions would be by no means groundless, if, after having annulled every statute of intolerance, from which the Public Religion has hitherto received a disgraceful support, the State should suffer no Reformation in the Discipline, the Revenues, or the Public Forms of our Church. But if the concession of perfect toleration must ultimately conduct us to an Ecclesiastical Reformation, why should that consequence impress the minds of our Legislators with terror, or excite the opposition of Statesmen, who are friendly to Religion, and who feel the noble ambition to improve their Country. With the superstition of elder times, we have done well to abandon their system of sanguinary persecution: It was a system offensive to humanity, offensive to the free spirit of our Constitution; and the tranquillity which it was calculated to produce was not the acquiescence of men convinced and satisfied, it was the repose of ignorance and blind credulity, the submission of slaves, afraid and often unable to think. If the State stop at this point of incomplete toleration, willing to discontinue corporal severities in support of the Public Religion, but determined to protect the abuses and imperfections of the Church, by disqualification for Civil Office, and the infliction of legal disgrace;

grace ; in that case, a state of contention, still increasing in turbulence, seems unavoidable.— The degree of persecution at present employed is sufficient to provoke and exasperate, it is not sufficient to intimidate and suppress the opponents of the Church: By the rigour of a sterner intolerance the inconveniences and the advantages of non-conformity might have been unknown in England, as they are in Spain and Italy ; free inquiry might have been stifled, the National system of Religion might have been established on unquestioned authority; and apparent uniformity might have been obtained. On the other hand, by a complete restoration of the rights of conscience, examination would be encouraged, knowledge would become generally diffused: ABUSE and SUPERSTITION would vanish before the increasing light, and mankind would gradually attain the summit of moral dignity, and happiness. But in the policy which we have adopted there is much injustice to no end or purpose ; we are intolerant, without obtaining uniformity, or securing the Public tranquillity ; and we sustain the mischiefs of dissention and perpetual controversy, without reaping any improvement from free examination.

But let us for a moment suppose, if the supposition will not be too alarming to the timorous Churchman, that the Test Laws have been repealed, that every trace of intolerance has been expunged from our statute book, and that a
Commission

commission has been issued by due authority to Prelates and Lay Churchmen distinguished for their wisdom and the liberality of their sentiments, requiring them to review the whole system of our Religious institutions, and to prepare a plan for its amendment. What measures of Reformation could in all probability be the result of this appointment, which would not be truly beneficial to the Community and such as ought to be promoted, if there were not a single Dissenter in the Kingdom: Is it a possible consequence of such commission that the Liturgy would be discontinued; and the unpremeditated prayer of the Dissenters would be adopted in its stead? Or that the Liturgy might be continued and in some parts might remain unaltered; but in many places by the intermixture of sentiments as disputable as those which would be expunged, would be rendered unacceptable to the great majority of Churchmen. Judging from the writings of Clarke and Hoadly, Jones and Jortin, Blackburne and Law, or from the known temper and writings of those eminent Churchmen of this age, who probably would compose a part of the commissioners, and whose sentiments would undoubtedly have great weight with their Lay colleagues, we may safely pronounce that no such consequence would be possible. It is the sentiment of every liberal Churchman, and it has been often expressed, that the use of a Liturgy ought to be continued, and that our present Liturgy, in the main part of it

ought to remain unaltered; but it is their clear conviction also that the language of dispute should never be heard in our addresses to the Almighty, and therefore our Forms of Public Worship ought to be rendered as nearly as they can be, conformable to the practice and phraseology of Scripture; some repetitions too they conceive, might be struck out of the Liturgy; some improvements might be introduced in its arrangement; and some verbal and grammatical changes might also be made with obvious advantage. These are alterations which to be approved, seem to need only to be stated: but rational and worthy men there may be who from excess of caution, and unperceived prejudices of various sorts, may not be willing to subject our Public Forms of Worship to that revival and correction, which to many appear indispensably necessary; but they will not be found in concert with Enthusiasts and the more sagacious Hypocrites of Church Power, contending that the Liturgy is too perfect to admit improvement, or denying that the changes suggested would render that venerable composition more free from just objections, more conducive to rational Piety, and more effectual to satisfy and unite to the National Church, the generality of serious Christians.

Can it be apprehended that subscription to the present Articles of Religion would be discontinued, only that a new system of Articles as exceptionable

ceptionable, as liable to dispute, might be obtruded in their room? The apprehension is totally groundless; all the most distinguished friends of Ecclesiastical Reformation have uniformly disclaimed and combated the design.— They well know that to substitute new unscriptural articles for the old, would be to change the subjects of dispute, or to vary their position, but not to lessen the violence of disputation, or to consult the honour of our Religion. They have generally declared their opinion that subscription to any system of human articles is improper; but if that form or practice were dispensed with, they could be well content, I am persuaded, that the Thirty-nine Articles should remain in the Book of Common Prayer as a monument of the theological opinions adopted by the Anglican Church in former ages, and a standard from which it has not thought fit to deviate in the present.

Can it be seriously thought, that the measures of the Commission here supposed, would tend to unnerve and relax the discipline of the Church? or to impair the dignity of the Bishops, or in any degree to lessen the general income of the Church? The apprehension of such consequences is too improbable; it is plainly an imaginary fear.—With respect to discipline, the direct reverse of relaxation would be the certain effect of a farther Reformation of our Church. There are perhaps no abuses which have been carried to so great excess, in the Church of

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England, none which have had so fatal influence on the morals and Piety of the People, or which have excited such just and general complaints, as the Non-Residence of the Clergy, and their frequent possession of a Plurality of Livings. Whenever our Ecclesiastical system shall undergo a serious review, those abuses will undoubtedly receive due correction : and if the Bishops possess not sufficient authority to compel the habitual residence of the Parochial Clergy, and to prevent any Plurality of Livings, as the law now stands ; such authority ought to be given to them, and the most effectual means ought to be provided, for securing the due execution of any new law which might be passed, to prevent such enormous abuses in future.

With respect to the dignity of the Bishops and the general Revenues of the Church, the sentiments of a Patriotic Bishop have been explained with his usual energy and intrepidity ; and apparently, with the general approbation of those Churchmen, who deem a Reformation of the Church expedient. If the advice of this distinguished Prelate were taken upon this subject, is it probable that he would recommend a diminution of the authority of the Bishops over the Parochial Clergy ; or propose their degradation from their seats in Parliament ? Nothing like either of these measures can be supposed ; the worthy Prelate certainly has no such design ; his advice has already been offered to the Episcopal Bench,
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and had it been accepted by his Right Reverend Brethren, perhaps the true interests of the Church of England would have been better consulted. For it cannot be dissembled, that a general suspicion at present prevails, that our Spiritual Lords are frequently and unduly influenced in their Parliamentary conduct by the hope of translation. It is evident therefore that a prohibition of the future translation of Bishops, and as the Episcopal Sees become vacant a gradual equalization of their revenues, would tend to re-establish the dignity and proper influence of the Episcopal character.

And if from funds which are neither difficult to be pointed out, nor improper to be thus employed, means were adopted to augment the small benefices of our Church, to such extent that each benefice would be a decent provision for the maintenance of a resident Clergyman; who could then complain of a strict execution of the laws against Non-Residence, or who could think that such a distribution of the Church Revenues, as that here alluded to, would not tend to the advancement of Religion, and the general satisfaction of the Parochial Clergy?

The last subject of complaint respecting our Ecclesiastical Institutions, viz. that of Tithes, shall be briefly noticed. This mode of providing by tithes for the Parochial Clergy, is often attended with great vexation to those who receive and to those who pay those dues, and it manifestly

manifestly tends to obstruct and defeat the endeavours of the Parochial Clergy to be useful in their respective stations. Whenever our Church System, therefore, shall undergo a revision, it is not improbable that this inconvenient kind of provision for the Clergy will be changed for another that is more unexceptionable. And if a valuation of the Tithes, payable to the Clergy throughout England, were made under due authority, on an average of their value for the three last years, and the average price of wheat for the same term were settled in a similar manner, it appears that a full and proper equivalent for the Tithes to be abolished might be obtained for each incumbent, in the shape of Corn-Rents, payable out of those lands which are now charged with the payment of Tithes; the Corn-Rents to be levied as the Poor's Rates are collected, but by a separate assessment; and the quarterly payment of these rents in four equal sums to be enforced in the same summary manner. By such regulations a provision for the support of the Parochial Clergy would be established, which would be adequate, permanent, and not liable to sink or rise with every fluctuation in the price of money: and thus the strife and litigation which too frequently arise between the Pastors and their Parishioners, respecting their present dues, would be totally extinguished; they would learn to consider each other as friends, whose interest was always the same; mutual good-will and har-

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mony would subsist between them with fewer interruptions; and the great business of Religion would be more successfully advanced. In a political view, the benefits of the change, as tending to promote a more skilful and extensive cultivation of the ground and an increase of population, are too apparent to need any illustration.

A Reformation of our Church, effected on these principles of moderation and mutual forbearance, would neither condemn any man's tenets nor impose them on others, it would not alter the standard of our Religious Opinions; nor vary the general tenor of Public Worship, it would not tend to unhinge the Constitution, by weakening the just authority of the Aristocracy; it would have a different consequence; by purifying the hierarchical part of it, and removing those suspicions of undue influence which now discredit the Episcopal Bench, it would tend to fortify the Constitution, and add fresh reputation to the House of Lords. It would not affect the property of any Churchman now possessing benefices; it would establish the proposed alterations in the distribution of the Revenues of the Church gradually, and as vacancies might be opened by death or promotion. And having fixed for the Parish Clergy a mode of provision, which would be adequate, permanent, and free from that frequent litigation to which their present property is subject: and having also secured their habitual residence in their respective parishes; it would at once pro-

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mote the comfort of the Clergy and their People; and at the same time advance the interests of Religion and the political welfare of the State.

That an Ecclesiastical Reformation, conducted on these principles and to this extent, would satisfy all who are now dissatisfied within the Church and without it, I am far from meaning to assert, for no possible measure of human power and wisdom could produce that miraculous effect; but it would satisfy many wise and conscientious Churchmen; it would reconcile many rational and moderate Dissenters; it would tend greatly to prevent the future defection of Good Men from the National Church; and if some able Men should still continue to think their mode of instruction by unendowed Teachers of Religion, not only preferable to the Public System, but alone unexceptionably proper, and fit in these times to be adopted, still I am persuaded they would rejoice to behold the Cause of Religion promoted more successfully by the National Clergy, under these regulations of the Church, although the diligence and success of the Clergy might possibly for a time reduce their notion of the impropriety of any Public Establishments of Religion to an unconfidential singularity of opinion.

It will be objected, undoubtedly, that INNOVATIONS are dangerous; for this has been the perpetual obstacle to every improvement; and if
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the objection had not been very frequently over-ruled, Mankind, instead of enjoying the comforts of civilized life, and attaining the dignity of rational and religious Agents, must have continued still in their savage state, wandering among the woods as wild as the beasts with whom they were surrounded. The alleged danger of Innovation, therefore, when destitute of any apparent probability from the circumstances of the change proposed, can only be deemed the vague surmise of an imaginary fear, the contempt of wise men, and the bugbear of fools alone.

But it will be observed, that Innovations in matters appertaining to Religion are always attended with peculiar danger; and that, in fact, few instances have occurred of a considerable change effected in the Religion of any Country, without producing Commotion, and even Revolution in the State. If this is a valid objection to any improvement in our Religious Institutions at present, it was a valid objection in the days of Luther, and in the earlier ages of Christianity. Many persecutions and many calamitous vicissitudes of fortune were endured, by the Primitive Christians, for three centuries before their Religion became the Established Faith of the Roman Empire: and in modern times, the Reformation of the abuses of the Church of Rome convulsed all Europe for ages. But each of these innovations, so highly bene-

ficial to Mankind, was fatal to the ancient Religion of those respective ages. Long established practices were condemned, deep-rooted prejudices were reprobated by the first Preachers of the Gospel, and their Successors the Ministers of Protestantism. After a long and violent struggle, Paganism first, and Popery afterwards, were vanquished by the Religion of the Bible; and the successful Innovators, in each instance, took possession of those Temples, from which, by the force of reason and argument, they had driven their Adversaries.

- But no similar events are now to be apprehended from the proposed Reformation of the Church of England. The improvements suggested, as they would be beyond comparison less beneficial than the two great Innovations just mentioned, so they would be less hostile to the ancient system which they are calculated not to destroy but to reform. The changes are proposed not by the Adversaries of the Church, but by Churchmen, jealous of her honour and anxious for her welfare; and if acceded to, they would be not the humiliating terms imposed by a victorious foe, but wise and seasonable concessions, adopted at the recommendation of friends for the sake of general conciliation.— The propositions contain nothing harsh, or exclusive, nothing injurious to the present Clergy, or tending to alter the Form of Government either in Church or State: If there is candour,
equity,

equity, or prudence, in the great Body of our Churchmen, a Reformation thus adopted, to heal divisions, and to comprehend and unite in one Society, Christians of various unessential opinions, could produce nothing like Commotion or Revolution: in a political view it would be a harmless, pacific, and even an advantageous change; and its consequences respecting Morals and Religion would be truly salutary to the Community.

On this brief consideration of the first part of my subject, it seems evident that no peculiarity of Religious Opinion which Dr. Price had, or could have adopted, ought to have excluded him from the Common Rights of Citizens, or subjected him to any legal reproach; and that from the repeal of those statutes, under which such worthy Men have long endured unmerited disgrace, no consequence with any appearance of probability can be expected to result, which would not be conducive to piety and virtue, and alike beneficial to the State and to the National Church. Let us proceed to consider his political heresies, as by some they are thought; and to inquire whether in this view of his character, he were not equally capable of exculpation, and ought not to have received the same complete absolution.

It is true, that Dr. Price did not scruple to declare his opinion, that the Constitution of England is deformed by many abuses; that the

People are mocked with a mere shadow of Representation; that the House of Commons is sunk in the grossest corruption. He was among the foremost to convey these sentiments to the Public, in warm and indignant language; and his strenuous zeal contributed greatly to animate the Popular Meetings, and encourage their Resolution to attempt the Reformation of Parliament. If these were errors of a pernicious tendency, and proofs of a seditious turbulence of disposition, some of the best and wisest men of this Country, as they have usually been esteemed, have fallen into the same errors, and have manifested a similar disposition. Of the distinguished senators alluded to, the name of one only shall be produced; but that a name which the accuser of Price once highly respected. If his sentiments of Sir George Savile have been changed, the impartial public has not ceased to revere him as a patriot of more un sullied honour than any other perhaps in the annals of England. It was his aim, indisputably, not to destroy the Constitution, but to remove its abuses, to correct its imperfections, and thus to augment the happiness of millions who live under its protection. Will candour then or will justice permit us to suppose that Price did not act with the same benevolent view? Or are sentiments and conduct, which are innocent and even laudable in Savile, seditious and criminal when adopted by Price?—Respecting the
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the corruption of Parliament, and the decayed state of our Constitution, their opinions, their language, and their conduct were similar.— With the reputation of Price, as a Political Reformer, that of Savile is intimately connected. Calumny may wish to separate the Philosopher, whom she hates, from the Patriot whom she would fear directly to attack. But she cannot disunite these excellent Citizens, and present them in a different point of view; she is unable to select the object of her malice, and shoot her envenomed arrow at him, without hazard to the other; the shaft which wounds the reputation of Price, must injure the fame of Savile; and when our incomparable Patriot receives the praise which his Benevolence and Public Spirit justly deserve, Price must be intitled to share the commendation with him.

But I shall not content myself with having sheltered the Political conduct of Dr. Price, under the example of Sir George Savile; his exertions to promote the Restoration of our Constitution, may be defended in a way that is more becoming the dignity of his much injured character. Let it be considered then, that men do not attempt to correct and improve what they wish to destroy; that a strong disapprobation of a body of National Representatives returned by the little, venal, and enslaved Boroughs, and the corrupt and factious state of Parliament which is the necessary consequence, may

may well consist with a decided approbation of the general frame of our Government; that he best proves his attachment to the Constitution, not who defends with blind or selfish zeal every defect which time, or fraud, or misguided authority may have introduced; but he who wishes to preserve the ancient foundations untouched, and the general plan unaltered; yet endeavours to remove the blemishes which disgrace the venerable structure; to repair what age has injured, to supply what experience has proved to be deficient; and to compel the subtle thief, or more audacious robber, to restore what each may have purloined or plundered; that the strength and beauty of the Fabric may thus be completed. And when this is done, or attempted in a regular way, by means unexceptionably legal, it is not on such ground, that the charge of disloyalty or sedition can be supported.

But Dr. Price admired the Constitution of the American Republic, and exulted at the success of the French Revolution; and from these admitted facts it was inferred, and pressed with the utmost oratorical vehemence, that he was criminally partial to the Governments of France and America, that he was hostile to the Constitution of England, that he aimed at the introduction of a Republic in this Country, that he was a bad Man, a bad Citizen, and a dangerous Innovator, and justly merited the joint punishment of private

vate censure and that legal disgrace which the laws already had inflicted upon him.

Such was the thin disguise assumed by spiritual persecution; such the poor pretence thrown over the real wish of the enemies of Liberty to introduce or extend a system of political intolerance, which happily is at present little, if at all, known among us. But surely it is an artifice unworthy that plain sincerity which best becomes the Legislature of a great Country to establish, or preserve a Religious Test, not with a view to repress any particular sect or doctrine of Religion, but indirectly to discourage some offensive peculiarity of political opinion. The rule from which a Legislature should never depart, is to adopt no purpose which is unfit to be avowed, and having adopted fit purposes, to pursue them by plain and direct methods. To support the Sacramental Test, because it is conceived to be a convenient instrument to prevent the growth of Republican Principles, is to authorise Intolerance in the Church, that the Civil Government may be enabled, at the same time, to practice indirectly that political Intolerance which the law does not directly admit; it is to establish a profanation of a Holy Rite of Religion, ostensibly to give the National Religion an unwarrantable support, but, in fact, to discourage political speculation, and to maintain the Constitution by means which it disclaims, by cunning, indirect and injurious methods,

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by the oppression of real innocence, and the punishment of a factitious offence, which the Legislature has not thought fit specifically, and with due precision, to define.

It has been already proved, that no limitation on the exercise of our rational faculties can be beneficial to Mankind; that political speculation as well as religious disquisition ought to be perfectly unrestrained; that free examination alone can check the growth of abuses, either in those Institutions which are of the highest importance, or in those which are of a subordinate rank, and that alone can secure to Society the progressive improvement in all its establishments of which it is capable, from the increasing exertions of industry, the more general diffusion of property, and the gradual advancement of the human character, in knowledge, in civility, in the love of order, justice, and rational liberty. Fortunately for this Country, the State has been less jealous than the Church; and though restraints have been unjustly imposed on religious disquisition, the right of political speculation remains in a great measure unabridged. In this respect, the Test Laws operate only incidentally, and as it were by chance; and the laws enacted to support the exclusion of the Stuart Family from the Throne of England, can produce their effect only on those Men, who, with Mr. Burke, deny the power of Parliament as the Agents of the Nation, to regulate or in any manner to alter
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the succession to the Throne. But questions have arisen, whether the House of Commons is a fair Representative of the People; whether the House of Peers might not better answer the purpose of its Institution, if no translation of Bishops were allowed; whether the influence of the Crown is not too great, even after all the reductions which it has undergone since the close of Lord North's Administration. On these subjects, I apprehend that there is no existing law according to which in its plain and direct meaning the most eccentric opinion can be punished.

These are subjects on which discussion is understood to be free, and some of the wisest Men this Country ever produced, in all these respects, have pronounced our Constitution faulty. That in them all it is faulty, in some degree, is perhaps indisputable; but to what extent of danger these abuses expose the Community, opinions may vary: whether the Constitution ought to undergo a more or a less extensive Reformation, whether it ought, with all its imperfections, to be supported and to remain wholly unreformed, or the political structure is too far decayed to admit repair, and ought to be taken down and modelled anew; these are questions which seem to be left open to the discretion of each Disquisitor; respecting them no line has been plainly drawn by the laws, beyond which political criticism shall not be allowed to pass,

nor has any clear criterion been fixed, by which the zeal of Public Spirit may be distinguished, in a legal view, from the temerity of rash Innovation. It would indeed be difficult, if not impossible, by any previous definition, to ascertain the limits within which speculation on constitutional subjects ought to be confined; the restriction would be alike contradictory to the principles of the Constitution, and incompatible with the interests of the Community.

Political Bigots, however, and Impostors in the State, like those in the Church, may wish to suppress this freedom of disquisition; and to obtain a new, or a more extensive code of political persecution. But the temper of the times is adverse to every species of Intolerance; and aristocratical Men must despair to effect that extension in any direction. And yet, as opportunity offers, they seem not unwilling to hazard the most unusual stretches of Parliamentary Power, to punish the expression of bold but undeniable truths. When a Petition was presented, in the last Session, to the House of Commons, complaining of great abuses in the late election for Westminster, almost in the very terms used by Sir George Savile, on the general subject of our *Septennial Fairs or Markets*, in his Address to his Constituents, the unwelcome truths grated on the ear of Parliament, and hardly could the rage of some hot Men be kept within any bounds
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of prudence by the two wisest Members of that Assembly. But for their judicious interposition, a few truths strongly expressed, and somewhat too bluntly addressed to Parliament, by the hasty resentment of some intemperate Men, might have been productive of the most pernicious consequences.

But a foreigner, by his repeated attacks upon our Constitution, has given more serious occasion to Government, to exercise their disposition to forbearance. I trust they have resolved to pass by the Author of the book alluded to, without any legal animadversion; for in such cases, legal animadversion must be unsafe, or it must be unnecessary.

If the Rights of Man had been a book feebly written, it would be folly, for it is needless to insist on any stronger objection, to drag the Author and his impotent malice into general notice by prosecution. But it is a book ably and forcibly written, though neither with candour nor wisdom. In that piece, Mr. Payne attempts to depreciate the Constitution, or as he chuses to term it the Government of England, by painting its inconveniences and defects in the strongest colours, while its present advantages and the capability of its receiving in a safe and regular manner, the highest future improvements are artfully thrown out of sight: He supports the doctrine of Republicanism, with an enthusiastic zeal, with an imposing confidence, and with rea-

soning often specious, and always daring; some truths are interspersed among many fallacies and misrepresentations, and a vein of coarse, but strongly sarcastic wit runs through and clumsily enlivens the whole. His Counsel, to break up and destroy the noble fabric of our Constitution, and rebuild a new political edifice on the plans of America, seems to be conveyed in the most dangerous shape, and far more likely to make an impression on those, to whom it is chiefly addressed, than if it had been delivered in a more classical composition, in which more attention had been employed to avoid the grossness of indecent language, and more solicitude displayed to shun whatever might tend to excite the lowest classes of the People to acts of violence and injustice. But mischievous as the effects of that book may be, they cannot be stopt by prosecution; the attempt would only aggravate the danger. If no law has been provided by the Legislature for the direct and immediate purpose of protecting by penal sanctions, the general principles of our Constitution; no attempt, by any forced constructions of law to punish the Adversary of our Constitution, can be with reason apprehended from the virtue and wisdom of those Men who compose a majority of the Cabinet. But if any penal statute actually does exist according to the direct meaning of which, though hitherto misunderstood, his virulent cavils, at the frame of our Government, can be considered

considered as crimes, and the Cavilier himself be subjected to punishment, it appears that such a law would be much more fit to be repealed than to be executed. For the right of intellectual freedom ought not to be violated, to prevent any occasional inconvenience from the abusive exercise of that right; the violation is always odious, and in the present instance would be very impolitic. Intolerance in the State, like persecution in the Church, would dishonour and weaken what it was designed to support.— The People cannot be compelled to love the Constitution; that affection must be voluntary, or it will not be felt; and it can only be generally felt, where happiness is generally and securely enjoyed. During the miseries of the American War no symptom of disaffection to the Constitution appeared; and the bulk of the English nation remains still strongly attached to it. The Proselytes to republican notions are few at present, and inconsiderable: They probably would be increased in number by prosecution; but by impunity & wise forbearance will effectually prevent any eventual danger from their speculations, provided the condition of the People be rendered more easy by the farther diminution of their burthens, and their wishes be gratified by a timely correction of those abuses in the Constitution, which have been so justly complained of. By these means, and by these means alone, the possible growth of a great Republican Party in this Country may be prevented; and
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those seeds of dissention, which have been so widely disseminated, may be trampled under foot, with contempt and abhorrence, by a contented and happy People.

To the most sincere Friends of Public Freedom in this Country, the counsel of Mr. Payne appears ill-timed, impracticable, undesirable for England, and more likely to retard than to accelerate the recovery of our just rights; and the most judicious Supporters of French Liberty deem his advice not less unseasonable for France, where it is fitted to obstruct the settlement of the Country and to prevent the secure enjoyment of Liberty, under that free Constitution which the National Assembly, with so much difficulty and hazard, and by such uncommon exertions of public spirit and political wisdom, had achieved for the French nation.

If, therefore, Dr. Price had concurred with Mr. Payne, in his wild project for the universal establishment of Republican Forms of Government; if he had asserted with him, that the English Nation has *NO CONSTITUTION*, and had proposed an attempt not to restore but to subvert what we call our Constitution, that, after the example of America, a *NEW* Republic might be built on the ruins of our ancient Form of Government: I must frankly own his character would have been undefended, and his memory unhonoured by me. I should not have questioned his *proud integrity*; I should have thought

thought him unconscious of the mischief and misery he was promoting; I should have considered him an honest Enthusiast, whose imagination had been heated by the contemplation of great Revolutions; as that of Mr. Payne may have been inflamed with extraordinary fervor, by his having been an actor in the Revolution of America. But I am aware that an honest Enthusiast may be a dangerous Politician; that he may propose projects replete with mischief and ruin, and equally fatal to himself and to his followers; to the Community, and to the Cause of Liberty, which he means to serve.

But Dr. Price was a Patriot of a different class; though perfectly disinterested, he was not an enthusiastic Politician; though active and public spirited, he was cool and rational; though strongly attached to Liberty, he was prudent and cautious to avoid unnecessary danger, not to himself, but to the Public.—When he considered the state of England, he beheld an excellent Constitution disgraced by corruptions of every sort; but he saw too, that something more was left to the People than the bare right *to petition the Legislature*; that the mass of the Community was yet untainted by corruption, and zealous for Liberty; that in many districts the just power of the Constituent Body, to controul their Representatives, was still preserved entire; while some of the Peers, and many even of those Members of the House of Commons, whose title to sit in
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that Assembly is unconstitutional, displayed a generous zeal to destroy abuse and usurpation, and restore to the People their ancient Constitutional Right. In these circumstances, he saw, with other Friends to Reformation, no reason to despair that a restoration of our ancient Right of a full and fair Representation, with triennial or even annual elections, might be gradually recovered for the nation by legal and pacific means. As on the one hand, therefore, he scorned meanly to cheat his Countrymen by adulating their prejudices, concealing the faults and abuses of the Constitution, and endeavouring to lull them into a false security, that would have been fatal to their freedom; so, on the other hand, perceiving that no necessity for great hazards existed, that the alternative offered to us was, not what was presented to the French and American Nations, whether Slavery or a New Constitution was to be chosen; but whether a Civil War, for the chance of a Republic, was to be preferred to the gradual melioration of our mixed Form of Government by peaceful means; he wisely preferred safe and progressive improvement to the doubtful event of great but hazardous Revolution.

And when the Men, who promoted a Reformation of the Constitution, were unfortunately divided into two distinct parties, one of which adopted that more moderate plan of improvements, which Mr. Pitt afterwards endeavoured

deavoured to establish, and the other, espousing a more extensive system of Reformation endeavoured to restore the right of universal suffrage, the support of Dr. Price was uniformly and from an early period given to the more moderate propositions. It is impossible, with the least appearance of equity and reason, to impute to the Duke of Richmond, and other Gentlemen who promoted the more extensive plan, any undue partiality to republican schemes of Government: but it is not less evidently contrary to candour and justice, to charge that improper predilection on Men, whose influence in times of much discontent was constantly employed to recommend to the People those less extensive demands, which appeared more likely to be attained by regular and pacific means.

About the same time, when the attempt to seize the Charter of the East-India Company, and to vest in a Body of Commissioners the whole civil, military, and commercial Patronage of the Company, with an unlimited command of the Treasury of Bengal, had excited a general apprehension of danger to the Constitution, the English Reformers, with few exceptions, exerted the utmost zeal to preserve the just Prerogative of the Crown. Whether this alarm were ill-founded, or otherwise, is not the question before us; it is sufficient to observe, that the avowed motive for a vigorous opposition to that measure by the Associations, and

particularly by the general Body of the Dissenters, with whom Dr. Price, on this occasion, certainly concurred in sentiment, was their conviction, that the principles of our limited Monarchy were endangered and ought to be supported. It is unreasonable, it is unjust, to condemn such Men as disloyal Citizens, from a detached phrase in a speculative Work, from an accidental expression of fervor at a convivial Meeting, against the testimony of their general conduct, and many practical proofs of their sincere and settled wish, not to subvert but to restore the Constitution.

Considered by this candid rule, which is almost always the reasonable and the just rule of Judgment, the conduct of Dr. Price respecting the Revolution in France is free from objection. His exultation on the establishment of French Liberty, was expressed in unison with the general joy of his Countrymen; who without any invidious reference to the Constitution of England, or any wish to adopt the peculiarities of the New Constitution of France, rejoiced with him that the millions of men who had been Slaves in that Country, had regained THEIR NATURAL RIGHT TO BE FREE. And surely it is no extravagant compliment to his Political Judgment, to believe that although he approved the full Representation of the People in a single Chamber in that Country; in which no hereditary Chamber of Nobles ever had been known; yet he totally disapproved any design to copy
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that example in England ; where an hereditary Peerage has been established from a very early period of our Government ; and where it is sufficiently evident that in the present circumstances of the Country, such a change in our Legislature would be at once impracticable and undesirable.

And with respect to the American Republic he may have thought very consistently, that it was a Form of Government admirably adapted to the circumstances of that Country at the time when the Revolution was effected, and yet very unfit to be introduced in this Country, which is in many important respects circumstanced in a manner that is widely different.— He may have contemplated with pleasure that equality in the distribution of property which has happily taken place in America, and the consequent equality of ranks and privileges which the Citizens there enjoy ; he may have expressed a mixed surprize and approbation of the humble port of Government in that Country and the cheap expence at which it is supported, when compared with the lofty and expensive grandeur of our European Courts ; and yet on considering his general conduct no reason may be found to doubt that he approved the Monarchical part of our Government ; and even applauded the conduct of the other great and enlightened Nation of Europe, when with consummate prudence in the moment of emancipa-

tion they resolved still to retain the Monarchy of France.

But Dr. Price deemed the condition of the Citizens of America preferable to that of the subjects of Great-Britain. And who that is a capable Judge will deny it? By the generous treatment of Great Britain for ages before the unhappy quarrel, the inhabitants of America had been enabled to place themselves in a situation more fortunate perhaps than that of any other Nation in the World. They now enjoy the benefits of Civilized Society, without its corruptions; they have the advantage of an equal distribution of property, without the usual Licence and tumult of Democratic States: for a population increasing with a rapidity unprecedented in any other Country they have an extent of territory amply adequate for ages to come; almost totally exempt from taxes they support their Government with the frugality of a little Swiss Republic, and yet have acquired the weight and consequence of a considerable State, soon to rank on a footing of equality with the first Empires in the world. But could Britain attain that enviable degree of happiness, merely by adopting the American Form of Government? No, certainly; were this adoption practicable, which undoubtedly it is not, yet unless a similarity in all the other circumstances could be obtained, a similar Form of Government would not confer equal happiness; it is much more probable

ble that it would create greater inconveniences than those which are at present complained of. But though this probably was the opinion of Dr. Price, yet, when he surveyed the different circumstances in each Country, and the different Governments corresponding with these circumstances which had been established in America and Britain, and compared the degree of felicity, which, under these dissimilar Institutions, was enjoyed in each Community respectively, he weighed their merits with the impartiality of a Philosopher, and gave superior praise where superior happiness was found to be produced. Is this a liberty of speculation not to be endured in England? It is not a greater liberty than has been allowed in France, before the Revolution, under a Government then thought less indulgent than our own.

The Accuser of Price extols, with justice, the political writings of Montesquieu; and cites, with peculiar applause, his enthusiastic praises of the Constitution of England. And yet let me ask, by what slavish adherent of Despotism, in France, has Montesquieu been censured, for this partiality to our limited Monarchy, as an evil subject, and disaffected to that absolute Government under which he dared to avow these generous sentiments? Or what good reason can be given, why the venerable Price should not be treated with equal candour and respect as Montesquieu himself? What has the English Di-

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vine done, more than the French Lawyer, for which he ought to be degraded from the class of those true Patriots, who have laboured at once to promote the liberties and to preserve the peace of their Country? Montesquieu saw that the introduction of Political Liberty into France, in his time, was impossible. He submitted to the mild and mitigated Despotism of Louis XV. but he taught his Countrymen those lessons of Public Freedom and Happiness, which gradually prepared them, in the next age, to overthrow their despotic Government, and to establish a system of Political Liberty under a limited Monarch. Price saw the happier state of Mankind in those Countries, where simple manners and a general equality of property admitted a Republican Form of Government; but he knew that, in his time, the Establishment of a Republic in England was impracticable, that it was a mode of Government unsuitable to the very unequal distribution of our property, contrary to the general sentiments of the nation, and ill-adapted to conduct the political business of our widely extended Empire. In these circumstances he did what a wise and good Man ought to have done; he owned the superior happiness enjoyed under the more popular and less expensive Government of America; but he zealously promoted that moderate correction of abuses, in the frame and duration of our Parliaments, which alone can prevent future convulsions

convulsions in England, and perpetuate our present form of limited Monarchy.

In his preface to the Spirit of Laws, Montesquieu says, "Plato thanked Heaven that he was born in the same age with Socrates; and I thank Heaven that I was born a subject of the Government of France." Dr. Price might have adopted similar language in England: He did more; he acted up to the sentiment which it expresses. In the year 1780, he was invited by the Congress to go over to America; he was requested to accept a principal Office in the State, and to lend his assistance in the establishment of a new system of Finance, to support the Government of the United States; yet, thus honourably requested to become a Citizen, and in some measure the Legislator of the American Republic, he refused to quit his native Country, and determined to live and die a subject of the Monarchy of England.

Whence then, it may be asked, has sprung that torrent of foul reproach, which has been poured on the head of this amiable and disinterested Reformer, and on whole Societies of Men with whom he had united in the generous pursuit of Political Reformation. What could provoke such fierce animosity, such insatiable malevolence; far exceeding the utmost rancour of opposition, which the Associations experienced during the period of their greatest activity? Personal enmity, disappointed ambition, the loss of popularity,

popularity, and the despair to recover it, each of these circumstances may have prompted a mind naturally irritable, to an attack on a distinguished Leader of the Popular Party; whose principles Mr. Burke certainly never approved, and by whose opposition his scheme of power had been not long before defeated. But somewhat more than these combined causes seems still to be wanting to account for these extreme hostilities.

After Mr. Pitt's motion, in the year 1785, to amend the Representation of the People in Parliament, had been rejected by the joint efforts of the Aristocracy, they seem to have thought the danger which had threatened their ill-acquired power in the Boroughs was at an end; that the People who had not supported with sufficient vigour the attempt to restore the Constitution, when the fatal effects of Corruption and Aristocratical Usurpation had been recently felt, would be lulled by the usual effects of Peace into a total neglect of their Constitutional Rights, till, by their continued acquiescence, those abuses would be confirmed by a prescriptive authority, which would continually gain new strength, and which no future effort of the People would be able to overcome.

But in these flattering expectations the Aristocracy were much mistaken. The Associated Bodies, though unsuccessful in 1785, were not dispirited by their defeat. Their Principles of Reformation

Reformation had been adopted by a Minister who had obtained the confidence of his Country, and to whom the friends of the Association were justly attached with peculiar warmth. On these Principles, a comprehensive plan for amending the system of our Representation had been formed and proposed to Parliament, with every advantage which the zeal and eloquence of that Minister could bestow. Repulsed as he was by the Commons, it was then evident that he had not wholly miscarried. His plan was approved, though not adopted; it was allowed that it would form a much better system of Representation than the present; and though Parliament had negatived the motion by a great majority, yet the measure appeared to be rather postponed than rejected by the public.

The popular Agents were not then stunned and astonished by the blow they had received, they did not then despair of final success. They knew their plan to be moderate, they felt it to be important, and they trusted, that a short time would show that the Rights and true Interests of the People were better understood; that the extent and danger of Election abuses and Parliamentary Corruption were more clearly discerned; and the importance and necessity of a Public Reformation were more generally felt by the Community. And these expectations have not been wholly disappointed. Since that period, the Associations have been reinforced by the

accession of many public-spirited and able men; and new Associations on similar grounds have been formed in different parts of the kingdom. Even in this indolent time of Peace, the spirit of Reformation for some years has been manifestly rising; and if the popular Party should fortunately add prudence equal to their increasing zeal, should endeavour to profit by their past mistakes, and avoid divisions by firmly adhering to temperate propositions, it seems probable that a substantial Reformation of Parliament with every public blessing in its train may be accomplished soon, by pacific means, and in the regular course of Parliamentary business.

It was impossible that a jealous Aristocracy could be inattentive spectators of this alteration in the mind of the Public. Undoubtedly, they have watched the progress of the spirit of Reformation with much and increasing anxiety. At first, their fears for those abuses in the Boroughs to which they owe their unconstitutional power, were not excited in any great degree; but at the nearer approach of danger, their apprehensions grew more serious; and what was aversion to the popular Cause before, was soon improved into keen and violent hatred. At last, the establishment of a Legislative Assembly in France on equitable principles of Representation, the exultation expressed by the People here, on the successful efforts which had been exerted to emancipate the French nation; and the apparent

rent ease with which a transition might be made in this Country, from admiring their Form of Representation to improving our own, these united circumstances pushed their panic to its present extremity. From that moment, their animosity no longer has known any bounds of justice, moderation, or prudence; the PEOPLE and their just Constitutional claims have been the constant objects of their unqualified scorn and derision, their unmitigated abhorrence and execration: and still in each wild and moody change of temper, these alternate excesses of rage and ridicule, of horror and contempt, have been but the varied expressions of their FEAR.

But there was method in their madness, and even their terror was not without art and cunning. It was well imagined, though the idea wants the merit of originality, that the spirit of Bigotry might be opposed with success to the spirit of Liberty; and that an attack upon our Political Reformers ought to begin with the Dissenters and to be chiefly pointed against them; not because they are more vulnerable in any part of their Public conduct than their Associates; but because against them it would be easy to revive ancient jealousies, which for some time had appeared nearly extinct; to rouse the fears of Churchmen for the safety of the Bishops, and the established Religion; and by insisting that powerful body of men against the Promoters of Political Reformation to secure for one age at least,

the defeat of their design. In the last century, a similar experiment had been tried with considerable success, against the Government of King William. The Zealots of the Church were then taught to confound an attachment to Liberty, with aversion to the National Religion; to think the Church was in danger, because Persecution was in some degree restrained, and to plot the ruin of his Government, that the Protestant Religion might be safe under the Protection of the Catholic James.—In the next Reign near its close, the Hereditary Right of the Stuarts was maintained by the same Party, with a zeal which the Disciples of Mr. Burke could hardly exceed, to prevent the succession of the Hanoverian Family, and the supposed unavoidable consequence of that event, the destruction of the Church of England.—And now, after experience has repeatedly proved its folly and injustice, the ancient cry has resumed fresh powers of delusion; the reason of the besotted multitude is once more confounded; in the complete Toleration requested by Dissenters, they foresee the overthrow of the Church; in the growing spirit of Liberty, they dread hostility to Bishops and their Articles, to the dignified solemnity of their Cathedral and the pious simplicity of their Parochial Worship. Their zeal is again excited for the suppression of Liberty; and in their Judgment, the safety of our Religion depends on the continuance of a Septennial Parliament,

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and the preservation of the little venal and enslaved Boroughs in Wiltshire and Cornwall.

The time also for the commencement of this attack on the Reformers was skilfully chosen.—The partial disorders which afflicted France, during her struggle for Freedom, and which are perhaps inseparable from every great Revolution, were then at their height. To a Rhetorical Writer these calamities presented an easy opportunity to dress up a train of horrible phantoms, to affright his Readers; and having thus subdued their terrified imaginations, he would find it no very difficult task to confound in their apprehension peaceful Reformation, with hostile Revolution; he would be able to persuade them, that CONSPIRACY was at work here, that a daring faction of Republicans were at the eve of Insurrection, preparing to burst forth, and determined to involve their Country in all the miseries of Civil War. This advantage was seen by the Gentleman, who is perhaps the most Enthusiastic Adherent of our Aristocracy; who has long been considered as the confidential Interpreter of their Sentiments, the Dragoman of their little Mock Divan. He saw the happy opportunity, and he seized it; but not without some prudent delay produced his Reflections; written in a mode of eloquence that is impure indeed, and meretricious; but not ill calculated by rapid declamation, and splendid imagery to surprize and seduce the Public opinion. By his vehement harangues in Parliament against the repeal

repeal of the Test Act, the minds of zealous Churchmen had been duly prepared to receive the intended impression.—By this more vehement Publication, the fears, the rage, and all the holy antipathies of our Zealots were increased to an extravagant degree; the most odious and chimerical suspicions were widely spread and received with implicit credulity; the bigotry of the great vulgar, and the small, was thoroughly inflamed; and Intolerance was stimulated by the self-vaunted Friend of Toleration, to repeat at Birmingham the same horrid excesses, which at the instigation of a wild Fanatic in 1780, had convulsed the Empire, and nearly consumed the Capital.

But in a Country where free discussion is not wholly prohibited, nothing that is contrary to truth and reason, nothing that is hostile to the general interests of the Community, can be permanently supported merely by rhetorical artifice, and eloquent misrepresentation. When Civil and Religious Liberty were thus attacked, their Friends were not wanting to their defence.—In Parliament, Men connected with Aristocracy, but in a noble independent way, stood forward with a zeal for Liberty which I believe to be genuine, and at that moment superior to every personal consideration: they avowed their exultation with the People here, at the establishment of Liberty in France; demonstrated the inconsistency of their ancient Colleague, and refuted the pernicious doctrine which he vainly endeavoured
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to maintain. Out of Parliament, a succession of able Writers, from every part of the kingdom, and almost of every denomination, Churchmen, Dissenters, Reformers, and Men who had not concurred in the measures of Reformation, all hastened to defend their Common Principles of Freedom. Some of these Patriotic Writers were completely victorious, and overthrew the positions of their Antagonist with a very superior force of reason and true masculine eloquence. Not one of them was wholly unsuccessful in the combat, and unable to prove him erroneous in any important instance; not one failed to produce some example of gross misinformation, respecting the Revolution in France, or some misstatement of facts and principles respecting the Revolution in England; some misrepresentation of the character and conduct of our present Reformers, some doctrine subversive of General Liberty, or contradictory to the true Principles of the English Constitution. By these united efforts to support the Cause of Freedom, the authority of our modern-Filmer has been reduced to its proper level; and the impression, which eloquent declamation had made in opposition to facts and the true theory of Government, has been gradually worn off the Public Mind. Powerful as the writings of that Gentleman have been to rouse and inflame the malignant passions, they have been weak and unsuccessful in the attempt to convince the judgment

ment of rational and disinterested Men; on whose decision ultimately depends the opinion of a whole Community. Already their determined disapprobation is followed by the general sense of the People, that the writings in question were calculated to stifle the Spirit of Liberty in England, and to perpetuate those gross Parliamentary Abuses, the necessary consequence of which must be a **CORRUPT SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT**, which promotes the interest of a **FEW**, and injures or destroys the happiness of **MILLIONS!** but that their actual tendency is to create that disaffection which they have failed to prove; that riot and commotion have been their immediate effects; and that, by having roused the fierce spirit of Revolution, it is to be feared their eventual consequence may be to deluge the land with blood.

It therefore behoves the persons who have long opposed every reasonable proposition, to correct those abuses of the Constitution, under the frivolous pretence, that they are **INNOVATIONS**, dangerous to the Peace of the Country; to consider, whether their continued perseverance in this policy, may not produce the convulsions which every good Man would deplore, but which the privileged Orders in the State are more peculiarly concerned, by every just and prudent concession to labour to avert. At present, it is evident, that moderate measures
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of Reformation, conceded with a generous frankness by the Aristocracy would be received by the People with joy, and thankful satisfaction. Let the Septennial Bill be repealed, let the Representation of the People be amended on the principles proposed by Mr. Pitt, let the Right of Suffrage be granted to Copyholders, and Householders of a certain class, with effectual Regulations to discourage expence and tumult at elections, and without the aid of Mr. Burke's Asiatic eloquence to decry the NEW Constitutions of France and America, the adoption of similar principles in England, would be for ages yet to come an impossible event. That this prudent restitution of the popular Rights would soon be followed by the repeal of the Test Laws seems most probable; and the establishment of complete Toleration would certainly render some farther Reformation in the Church unavoidable. But this correction of Ecclesiastical Abuses would then be conducted on the same principles of cautious wisdom, and well-tempered zeal which strongly recommend the plan of Political Improvements, which has been now mentioned. In that case Theoretical perfection would neither be attained perhaps, in our Ecclesiastical Institutions, nor in the Form of our Political Government; but what would be practically much better would be effected; what would be more agreeable to the temper and prejudices of the Community, more suitable to the state of morals, and the

distribution of property in the Country would be established.

By these temperate plans for accomplishing a Reformation of Parliament, for amending the Forms and correcting abuses in the Discipline of the Church, with the Repeal of every Intolerant Statute which would be naturally connected with those beneficial measures, the hazard of any great and violent Revolution in this Country would be avoided. The Nation would be happy in the secure possession of Liberty, and in the establishment of a Religion completely tolerant in its Spirit, and in its forms at once rational and pious, yet calculated for the comprehension of good Men of many unessential diversities of sentiment. The Dissenters of every denomination would thus be relieved and conciliated; the Bishops would recover the confidence of the Public; and the Parochial Clergy would acquire competence and private comfort; the Nobles would retain the safe unenvy'd possession of their constitutional privileges; and the People would rest satisfied with the surrender of those usurpations on their Rights of Representation, and Frequent Election which have so nearly ruined our happy System of Government. But should the Nobility, who on other great Political questions have been usually divided continue, combined, though with some splendid exceptions, in their opposition to every equitable plan of Public Reformation, their mistaken policy may
too

too probably produce the most pernicious consequences. Men robbed or cheated of their Rights may be patient while a hope of redress remains by regular and pacific means; but when frequent denials of Justice have irritated, and driven them into desperate Councils, they seldom will stop at the mere recovery of their Rights. The People may commence their struggle on firm ground in defence of their ancient and undoubted Liberties; but in the heat and fury of the conflict, they may too probably be led far to exceed those limits. In such unhappy contests, they naturally wish to disable their antagonists, they too often rush on to retaliation and revenge. This was the unfortunate consequence of commotion in a former reign; hardship and calamity to the Many, with the destruction of the most respectable Orders in the State, were then the effect of a Civil War, which was provoked by the oppressive Government of Charles the First, and in which the People originally engaged with a view not to destroy but to protect and preserve the Constitution.

In the actual situation of the Country at this juncture, the dread of insurrection, as a nearly approaching calamity, is surely a groundless apprehension. No concerted design to recover the lost Rights of the People by force, and to retaliate on the ruling Classes can be thought possible at present; it must be allowed to be a visionary or an affected fear. The Spirit of Revolution

has been conjured up, indeed, by one who knows not how to lay it; but it stalks through the land, presenting a fearful and portentous appearance, gazed at and shunned by the general mass of the People. At this moment, the state of the nation, respecting its Commerce and Public Revenue, is prosperous beyond its expectations, or its hopes; general satisfaction is the apparent consequence, and for some time that satisfaction may countervail in the Public Mind, the sense of danger to the Liberty of the Community. But let not this flow of unexpected prosperity lull our hereditary Rulers into a false security, which may be fatal to them and to the nation. To be safe, they must be just; and to preserve their Constitutional Privileges, they must consent to part with that power which they have gained in defiance of Law and the Constitution. The grievances complained of are great and undeniable; they are felt as evils; they are resented as injuries; and silent as the Collective Body of the People now are, and apparently to vulgar eyes neither very generally nor very anxiously solicitous for redress, yet the time may come, much sooner, perhaps, than many may imagine, when their resentment will be found truly formidable.

Before the debt of the Public can be much reduced, and the load of those taxes which bear hardest on the bulk of the Community can be taken off, in any considerable degree, a great European War may break out upon us; or in
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the course of our struggle to depress or dethrone the Sultan of Mysore, our Oriental Allies may desert us; disasters may attend our Armies, the Carnatic may be lost, and Peace on any tolerable terms may be unattainable. At Home, and in Ireland, many conceivable events, to which a more direct allusion would be improper, may contribute to increase the danger and aggravate the discontent of the Nation. By misfortunes like these the sunshine of our present situation may be gradually, or suddenly clouded over; and a stormy season may succeed, in which the mild voice of moderation could not be heard. Astonished by the fall of our national grandeur, impoverished by the loss of credit, commerce, and landed rents, oppressed by an enormous load of taxes, and exasperated by the long-continued injustice of the superior powers, the English People would probably then renew, but in a louder tone, those expostulations with which the ear of Parliament has been so lately stunned; higher terms of Reformation, though still within the verge of the Constitution, would be expected; the restitution of our ancient Rights of Annual Parliaments and Universal Suffrage would be demanded; and should those claims be refused by the Legislature, the discontent of the Public would be ten fold increased.— Impatient from distress, enraged by this last injurious refusal of their Right, and urged on by the examples of France and America, the People would

would begin to extend their views of Reformation beyond the bounds of the Constitution; they would become less fearful of trying new and hazardous schemes of policy; the principles of the National Assembly, or of the American State, would gradually become the principles of a majority of the People of England; and thus the persevering injustice of the Aristocracy would at last produce, in the Community, that disaffection to the Constitution, which, without falsehood and calumny, cannot now be imputed to a few Individuals. Again the most respectable Orders in the State would be attacked by the People; again the abolition of the Upper House of Parliament would be effected; and the Throne itself would be again shaken or overturned: and after infinite hazards and calamities, perhaps, a NEW Republic, the beneficial effects of which may well be doubted, would be established on the ruins of the Constitution; in which no essential change is now meditated by the Popular Party; or could be approved by wise and dispassionate Men. But the influence and credit which such persons may now possess with the People, at that crisis would be lost; their pacific counsels would be over-ruled by the eagerness of impetuous Men, better suited to the violence of that tempestuous season; their intreaties to respect the privileges of the Nobles, or the just Prerogative of the Crown, would then be slighted by the People, as their solicitations to restore the

Rights

Rights of the People have hitherto been disregarded by the Nobles and the Crown.

Such, it is to be feared, would be the progress of our national dissensions, if an equitable Restoration of Popular Rights be still delayed or denied; and thus, perhaps, a scene of confusion would be commenced, the mischiefs of which no power of numbers could calculate, and no human wisdom could then prevent. For the preservation of general peace and harmony, from a just regard for rational Liberty and the happiness of the Community, it is devoutly to be wished, that justice may be conceded before the hour shall arrive, when fierce contention to recover the Rights of the Nation shall be unavoidable. Instead of hazarding their dignified privileges and great constitutional powers to preserve their encroachments on the Rights of Election, prudence and their interest, justly considered, seem to recommend to our great Patrician Families and to the Crown to secure those powers and privileges, and the Constitution itself, by yielding a power unwarrantably gained, before the national resentment be completely roused, and moderate concessions no longer would be accepted with the grateful approbation of the Public. To our hereditary Rulers and to the Community, there is much danger in the counsels of wild and enthusiastic Men, whose writings, however opposite they may be in their principles and their immediate aim, have the same

fame ultimate tendency, by exciting extravagant demands on the one hand, and suffering no concession on the other, to provoke discord and national confusion. In the peculiar circumstances of this Country, it is evident, that the consequence of those counsels may be in the highest degree calamitous. But by the patience and moderation of the People, and the justice and public spirit of the Nobles, and confidential Advisers of the Crown, general harmony, on the principles of a fair and equitable accommodation, may yet be secured, and the impending danger may be averted.

That the suggestions of prudence, and the still higher considerations of justice and benevolence, may avail to prevent the miseries of a Civil War, every good man must deeply imprecate. But should other counsels unfortunately prevail, should the Nobles, whether in opposition to the Crown, or in its confidence, continue inseparably united to support the present depraved state of the Legislature; should the Nation be finally provoked to seek redress from Commotion and a Revolution effected by force, in that unhappy event, which none would more sincerely deplore than they who have long been the Advocates of a temperate Reformation, those persons will at least enjoy the conscious satisfaction of having laboured to prevent confusion, not by quenching the spirit of Liberty, not by sanctifying abuse and usurpation, with every consequent

consequent corruption, but by pointing the zeal of their Fellow-Citizens to its proper and necessary object, to the attainment of a just and moderate correction of great Parliamentary Grievances, by those orderly and legal means which our impaired Constitution still affords. At that calamitous period, popular rage may be the instrument of ruin; but the true cause of the public misery will be found in the pride, ambition, and selfish policy of our hereditary Rulers; and that obstinacy, which refused to surrender the smallest particle of its usurped power, will be condemned by an impartial posterity, more than the violence of that national resentment which punished usurpation with extreme severity.

A P P E N D I X

TO THE

D E F E N C E of Dr. P R I C E.

ADVERTISEMENT respecting the PAPERS
contained in the APPENDIX.

THE First Paper in this Appendix, contains a Petition to Parliament from the County of Cambridge, in the year 1780, for the redress of grievances then universally felt and complained of. The Meeting was called by the Yeomen of the County: They formed a great majority of the Meeting, and they consisted chiefly of Dissenters from the Church of England. And yet a Petition, avowing an explicit preference of the Constitution of England, was adopted (with only one dissentient voice) by a Meeting so composed, in a season of great distress and general discontent under the conduct of Government.

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The Second Paper contains a Petition to Parliament from the County of Kent, in the year 1782, which was afterwards adopted, with no material variation, by the Counties of York, Cornwall, Essex, &c.—In each of these Counties there are many Dissenters; in Yorkshire and Essex they are very numerous, and they signed, with zeal, a Petition which complained of the gross inequality of the Representation of the People in Parliament, and yet at the same time expressed their most ardent wish, that the excellent Constitution, under which they had the happiness to live, might be maintained on the principles on which it is founded. In Yorkshire alone, it is probable that this Petition was signed by not less than two thousand Dissenters, who were also Freeholders of that County.

Paper III. contains Resolutions by the Constitutional Society at Nottingham, in the year 1780. In that Town, Dissenters are more numerous, in proportion to Churchmen, than in almost any other place in the kingdom; they were, I believe, a great majority of the Constitutional Society by which these Resolutions were adopted. In these Resolutions, the Society declare their adherence to the popular doctrine of equal Representation and annual Parliaments with great force and energy; but the most ingenious malice may be defied to point out any passage in this Paper, which marks the least disaffection to the Constitution: on the contrary, the Association here

complain that the ancient usage of Parliament has been departed from; and declare, that to recover Parliament to its constitutional character is the object of their pursuit; but if the Reform, expressed in their Resolves, in all its extent should be found impracticable, they will thankfully receive so much of it as can be procured.

Paper IV, contains a Declaration of the Principles of the Constitutional Society at Cambridge, which was formed in the year 1783; and of which the Members were chiefly Inhabitants of that Town, and Dissenters of various denominations. In that Declaration, expressions may be found which indisputably prove the attachment of that Society to the mixed Form of Government, established in this Country; the principles of which are there recognized as the fundamental principles of the Cambridge Association.

Paper I

Paper I.

Petition to Parliament from the County of Cambridge, in the year 1780.

The Petition of the Gentlemen, Clergy, and Freeholders of the County of Cambridge,

To the Honourable the Commons of Great-Britain in Parliament assembled,

Sheweth,

THAT your Petitioners do thus publicly declare their entire and zealous approbation of the Legislature of this Country, as placed in the free and independent concurrence of King, Lords, and Commons, in preference to every other mode of Civil Government.

That they anxiously wish the blessing of this Form of Legislation to be continued to their latest posterity in its Constitutional purity.

That they seriously apprehend this Form of Legislation will be essentially vitiated, if not virtually changed, whenever the treasure and offices of the Community shall be successfully employed to bring the Representatives of the People under the influence of the Executive Power.

That they conceive a strong tendency to this change, is at present, and has formerly been, too notorious to admit of doubt, or to require proof.

That

That they consider every system of Public Administration, carried on by means of Parliamentary corruption, however sanctified by time, precedent, or authority, to be absolutely unjustifiable on every principle of good sense and sound policy—to be as dishonourable to the upright intentions of the Crown, as it is burthensome to the property, and dangerous to the Liberties, of the People.

Your Petitioners do, therefore, most solemnly apply themselves to the Honour, the Justice, the Integrity, of this Honourable House, praying that effectual measures may be taken by this House, to inquire into, and correct, any gross abuses in the expenditure of Public money, to reduce all exorbitant emoluments of office, to rescind and abolish all sinecure places and unmerited pensions, and to use all such other Constitutional means as may tend to establish the independence of Parliament on the most lasting foundations.

And your Petitioners are the more earnest in this their prayer, because they are of opinion, that no other expedient can equally tend to heal our domestic divisions, to unite the whole Nation in the warmest support of his Majesty's Person and Government, against the unprovoked hostilities of the House of Bourbon, and to put a final period to that primary source of National distress—the American War.

Paper II.

Paper II.

*Petition to Parliament from the County of Kent,
in the year 1782.*

The Humble Petition of the Noblemen, Gentlemen, Clergy, and Freeholders of the County of Kent,

Sheweth,

THAT your Petitioners, sensible of the excellency of that Constitution under which they have the happiness to live, most ardently wish to have it maintained upon the true principles on which it is founded.

Your Petitioners further shew, That it is necessary to the welfare of the People, that the Commons' House of Parliament should have a common interest with the nation; and that in the present state of the Representation of the People in Parliament, the House of Commons do not sufficiently speak the voice of the People.

Your Petitioners therefore humbly pray this Honourable House to take into their most serious consideration, the present inadequate state of the Representation of the People in Parliament, and to apply such remedy to this great Constitutional Evil, as to this Honourable House may seem meet.

And your Petitioners shall ever pray, &c.

Paper III.

Resolutions *by the Constitutional Society at Nottingham, in the year 1780.*

At a full Meeting, the following Resolutions were unanimously passed, viz.

THAT an equal Representation is the Right of the People, and essential to the very idea of a Representative Body.

That annual Parliaments are the old constitutional usage of Parliament, the true law of the land, and the best security which can be furnished for the virtuous conduct of Parliament, and for its Independence on every power whatsoever, unless that of the People alone.

That the present inequalities in the Representation of the People, and the continuance of Parliaments beyond a single Session, are altogether a departure from, and a corruption of, the usage and law of Parliament.

That to recover Parliament to its constitutional character, by a more equal Representation, and the return of annual Parliaments, is no romantic object, but worthy of a free People to demand,

as

as it is within their power to obtain, and is alone adequate to their wishes.

That the holding any Place, Pension, or Contract, at the disposal of the Crown, (unless, perhaps, in some few instances, which may be expedient for the Public business, and not dangerous to the Public safety) is absolutely incompatible with a seat in the House of Commons.

That it is unworthy of the People of England, in their present state of discontent and alarm, to desist from that vigorous but legal prosecution of the Reform contained in the preceding resolves; and that every thing which is essentially short of this, is but a mere temporary expedient, not affording even the promise of a permanent good to these Kingdoms.

That no Candidate to Represent the Town of Nottingham, or any County, Town, or Borough, whatever, in Parliament; who does not adopt the sentiments, and pledge himself by the honour of a Man and of a Briton, for the recovery of the Rights of the People, as expressed by the preceding Resolves, (or so much of them as can be obtained) deserves, or shall receive, our Vote or Interest in any application for a Seat in Parliament.

That the above are our firm Resolves; we adopt the Reform expressed therein in all its extent: but if, in all its extent, it should be impracticable, we will thankfully receive so much of it as can be procured, and join our Fellow-Citizens in the pursuit of any part of so desirable an object.

That the thanks of this Society be conveyed to Major Cartwright, for his judicious and manly conduct in every thing which affects the Liberties of the People; and that this Society will be happy to give him every expression of their esteem and gratitude which shall be in their power.

S. HAYWOOD, Secretary.

Paper IV.

* *Principles and Resolutions of the Constitutional Society at Cambridge, in the year 1783.*

We declare,

1. **T**HAT, in our opinion, every individual of Mankind is born with a natural right to Life, Liberty, and Property.

2. That the associating of many individuals into one Collective Body, is for the security, and not for the suppression of Natural Rights.

3. That the consent of the People is the true origin, and the happiness of all, the only worthy end of Civil Government.

4. That there is in all States impliedly, and in the British State expressly, a mutual contract between the governors and the governed.

5. That

* Extracted from the Minute Book of the Society.

5. That, in the British State, the contracting Parties have agreed not to invade each other's Rights.

6. That one Right of the People of Great-Britain is, to make laws for their own Government.

7. That our Ancestors, in very remote times, used to make their own laws, and elect their own officers; and that in later times every free Man voted for Representatives in Parliament, for it was only in the Reign of Henry the Sixth that voting was restrained to Frecholders of forty shillings a year.

8. That the present state of Parliamentary Representation is extremely defective, and ought to be Reformed.

9. That the British Constitution of King, Lords, and Commons, is the most perfect theory of Government in the world, and may be rendered as perfect in practice, if the House of Commons be so Reformed as to be independent on, and uninfluenced by, the other two branches of the Legislature.

10. That the House of Commons hath been manifestly under an improper influence from the other two branches of Legislature, from which innumerable evils have arisen to the Country at large, as well as to the influencing parties themselves; and that unless some wise and effectual measures be speedily taken to restore the Independence of that House, by reforming the Representation, the Country must be overwhelmed in ruin,

Unanimous

Unanimous in these opinions, we declare, that the end we propose to obtain is a PARLIAMENTARY REFORM.

The whole House of Parliament consists of King, Lords, and Commons; but our attention is wholly confined to the last, they being the Representatives of us.

In order to obtain, as far as lies in us, this desirable end,

We resolve,

That we will, by such peaceable and constitutional Measures as shall appear to us best calculated to answer the end, endeavour to obtain a Reform in the Representation.

That at all future elections for this County, we will use our endeavours to promote the interest of only such Candidates as shall appear to us most likely to procure a more equal Representation in Parliament, and a shortening of its duration.

That we will put the Candidate whom we support to no expence, but will discharge all the expences that may attend our voting, &c. &c. &c.

THE END.

